ONG ITALIAN PEASANTS

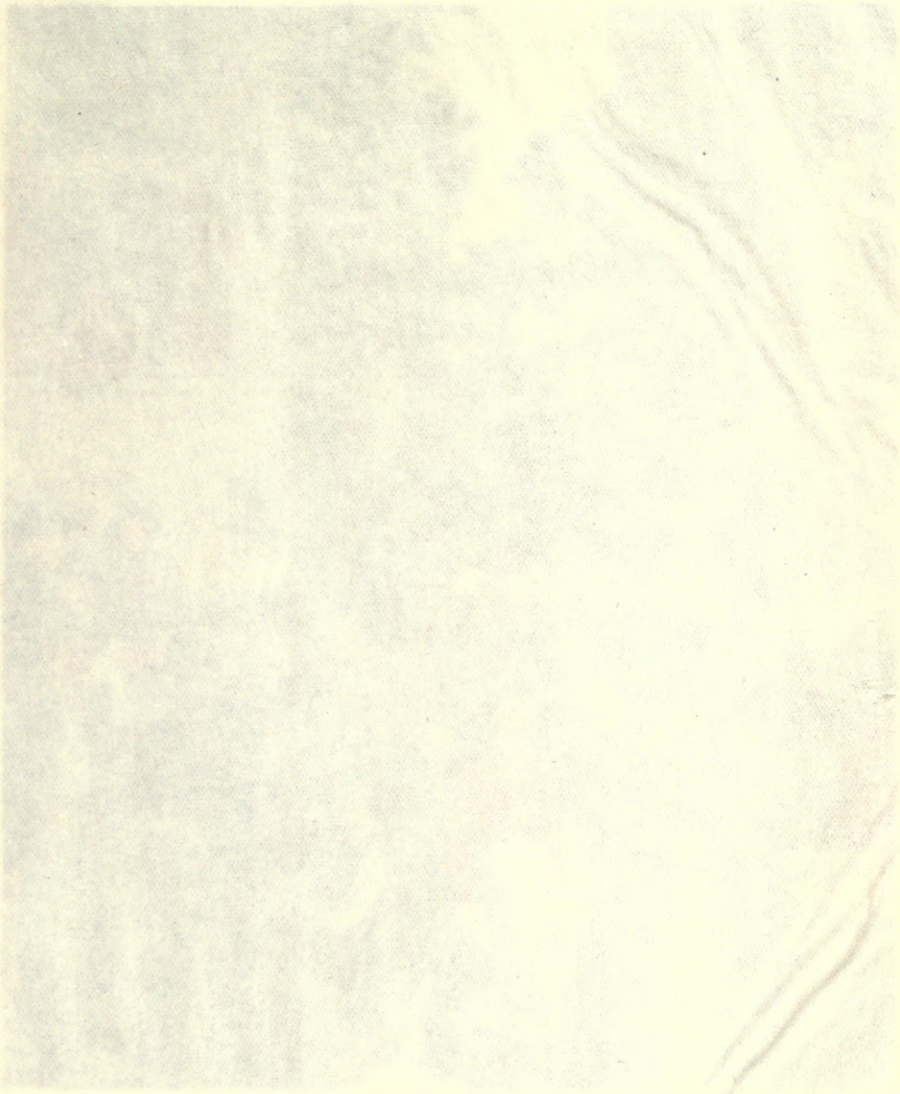


Irene Owen Andrews

Oct. 1924

AMONG ITALIAN PEASANTS





The Evening of the Festival.

AMONG ITALIAN PEASANTS

Written and Illustrated by

TONY CYRIAX

With an Introduction by

MUIRHEAD BONE

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

Annex
DG
450
C99a
1920

PREFACE

I REMEMBER once, in company with a distinguished critic, leaning on that balcony at Settignano which spreads out before one the whole Tuscan plain; but though the day was lovely and the year at the spring, my friend ventured to make a grimace, explaining that too many maiden ladies had wept over this view for it to move him now. I did not know then the sketches of Tony Cyriax, and so had nothing wherewith to comfort him, and, in fact, I knew only too depressingly what he meant, and how wellnigh impossible it is to see Italy in a fresh, candid way. Imagine, then, the pleasure in making the acquaintance of the artist these pages introduce to the public, for I think she possesses this gift of an untouristlike vision in a quite definite degree.

If we consider how well we know in advance what an artist means by his sketches of Italy, we must confess when these pages have been well studied, how little we could have anticipated the drawings of Miss Cyriax. In place of the well-thumbed repository most of us find it, her Italy is a vivid, hard, strange new place, peopled by workmen and peasants, who have a fascination about them that the picturesque could never give. They are a living people, who go about their tasks quite oblivious of this foreigner among them, who must surely have been disembodied to seize such an interior as that of the group round the table, the unwinking eye of the lamp

2038691

keeping company with the man turning over his *Corriere* for the hundredth time, too sleepy to give up, wistful to extract the pinch of marrow his eye noted some time back. How perfectly it gives the long-drawn-out ennui of the Italian peasants' night! Or 'After the Funeral'—is it not perfect in its way for humour and character? The quarrel which has broken out at last, as every one knew it would, is expressed with the singleness of heart and the freshness of insight which we associate with only the great artists. It is a disarmingly small sketch, but it is a masterpiece of simplified character, exactly right in its putting down. We are all yearning for the genuine naïf. This artist is brimful of it.

It is true that she tells us nothing we did not know about Italy, but Tony Cyriax has the great merit of telling us for the first time that these things can be expressed in art, and that their effect is to create stroke by stroke, imperceptibly almost, the *real* Italy which we in our pictures are always, somehow or other, leaving out. She sees the 'Young Italy' which never dies, wringing a living out of their picture-like but flinty soil only by incredible patience and hard work. We all turn aristocrats when we cross the Alps. There is a rare temper displayed throughout these sketches, breathing a noble democracy and sympathy which entitles Miss Cyriax to be considered a new personality in art.

MUIRHEAD BONE.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	SAN LORENZO	1
II.	THE DANCE AT THE INN	15
III.	THE VILLAGE	28
IV.	THE RIDGE OF HOUSES	38
V.	CHARCOAL BURNERS	50
VI.	THE POLICE COURT	65
VII.	RAIMONDO	83
VIII.	CAVALLERI	95
IX.	LIME BURNERS	109
X.	THE FESTIVAL OF THE MADONNA	120
XI.	THE MOUNTAIN	138
XII.	CORNIGHE	155
XIII.	HAYMAKERS	173
XIV.	HAILSTONES	187
XV.	BIRDS OF PASSAGE	194
XVI.	SAN LORENZO AGAIN	220
XVII.	THE LAST DAYS	238
XVIII.	AMERICA	257

COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

The Evening of the Festival	*Frontispiece*	
Riccardo and Rosina	*facing page*	4
Raimondo and Bigi by the Fontana	,,	84
Silkworms	,,	96
The di Marchesis at Dinner	,,	170

BLACK AND WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS

An Evening at San Lorenzo	,,	8
Bortolo Stirring the Polenta	,,	12
Sunday at the Inn	,,	32
Cristofolo Crossing the Ridge of Houses	,,	40
The Mourners	,,	48
An Altercation	,,	100
Ghita	,,	130
Loads of Hay	,,	174
Filip's Niece	,,	200
Nocturnal Visitors	,,	236
Teschini Makes a Speech	,,	244

O cari giovanotti,
Domani dobbiamo partire;
A costa di morire,
In America voglio andar.
Quando sarò in America,
Quando sarò in America,
Quando sarò in America,
L'amante la qui sterrò.
Quando avrò qui stato,
Quando avrò qui stato,
Quando avrò qui stato,
In Italia riturnerò.
Quando sarò in Italia,
Quando sarò in Italia,
Quando sarò in Italia,
L'amante la sposerò.
Quando avrò sposato,
Quando avrò sposato,
Quando avrò sposato,
In America turnerò.

Oh, dear boys and girls,
To-morrow we must part;
Rather than starve here,
I must go to America.
When I am in America,
When I am in America,
When I am in America,
I leave my darling here.
After I have been there,
After I have been there,
After I have been there,
I will come back again.
When I am back in Italy,
When I am back in Italy,
When I am back in Italy,
My darling I will wed.
But after we are married,
But after we are married,
But after we are married,
I must go back to America.

CHAPTER I

SAN LORENZO

EARLY one morning I stood with Rosina, waiting by the fontana. It was five o'clock and we were late, too late to get as far as the church in time for the service. That was why we waited at the fontana, for the procession would pass there and we could join in at the rear.

The priest was going to bless the fields at the Campo Santo above San Lorenzo. To-morrow the ceremony would take place on the farther side of the village, and the next day somewhere else, and so on for the rest of the week, till all the fields had received their blessing.

It was March. Trees were budding and in sheltered places were the first spring flowers. The almond trees were in blossom. Water rushed down the mountain and tumbled into the lake below. Our hearts were full of hope for the summer.

The sun was not yet very high above Monte Moro across the lake. It was still in shadow with white mist clinging to it in places. On our side the air was clear, and the sunshine, pale and cool, made the morning lovely.

Some women were washing clothes in the large tanks of the fontana, and we spoke with them. Rosina always had a lot to say, and there was plenty of time, the procession had only just started.

We could hear the chanting, but a hillock and olive-trees screened the singers from our sight. At that place the mountain was one vast slope down from the rampart of crags at the top to where we stood, and then it broke and fell down to the lake in a muddle of precipices, hillocks, and gullies, all at different heights and angles.

The chanting came nearer. It was a mournful minor sound, rising and falling like a wail. It made me think of death. The procession came into view round the corner. The priest headed it with two boys carrying the book and censer and darkly clad figures followed, walking two and two. They looked so tiny in the vast place—so pitiful, and the song was so sad. It had nothing of the joy of fertility or of hope in it. Sadly and slowly they came.

The women who had been washing hid behind the pillars, and Rosina and I joined in at the rear of the procession. It went on down the road, and then turned up a little grassy path leading to the Campo Santo. We stood or knelt amongst the nameless graves whilst the priest recited the prayers. Some of the old women fingered their beads, and heads were bent in devotion. Then the priest read from the book which a boy held open, and then he sprinkled the holy water and prayed. The other little boy swung the censer and puffs of incense rose up in the still morning air.

Then there was a stir and the procession reformed to retrace its steps back to the church. The same sad Litany was chanted again, and they went on singing until once more in the twilight of the church.

Rosina and I did not walk farther than the gate of San Lorenzo, where we turned in and went back to the farm. I felt saddened

and forgot about the lovely morning. Neither of us spoke, both listening to the distant singing.

At last I said: 'Whatever does it mean?'

'Signora,' answered Rosina, 'we pray that the crops shall not be spoilt by the hail. In these parts we have great hailstorms which ruin the harvest . . . and then we starve.'

.

San Lorenzo was a large farmhouse built on a piece of level ground at the top of a precipice. It was a halfway house between the town on the lake shore below and the little village higher up, but it was much nearer the village. For many years Rosina had had a licence and sold wine. But a year ago she had given it up. No one, however, paid much attention to that, and Rosina gaily served those she could trust not to tell. The villagers came very often to drink or to talk, and there was continual coming and going and lively altercation. I often sat in the kitchen listening to peasants talking, or to hear what Rosina had to say about them when they were gone. But on this particular afternoon we were discussing Riccardo, her youngest son.

He was washing up. Rosina, as usual, had been abusing him, and I had taken his part. She looked at him critically.

'And you really think,' she said, 'that Riccardo is a good boy?'

'Of course I do, but he is young, and you can't expect him to work all day.'

'But he doesn't work, he dawdles. Look at him now. He has been two hours washing up those dishes, I could have done it all myself in twenty minutes. But Riccardo, can't you hurry—your father is wanting you in the field.'

Riccardo turned back to his work, but did not hurry. He washed each plate with deliberation, rinsed and placed it on the side table to dry.

His mother, in a state of exasperation, had been calling him all the names she could think of.

He had merely turned his head round, saying in a most idiotic manner, 'He-he!'

It was the last straw, and Rosina, furious, had slipped off her wooden-soled shoe and had given his shoulders some hard thuds with it.

Poor little Riccardo. Life was one succession of tasks done unwillingly. If it wasn't his mother urging him on indoors it was his father calling outside. It was Riccardo here, Riccardo there, and Riccardo himself somewhere else, sublimely doing nothing. He never played or did things for his own amusement, he just loafed.

I thought Riccardo a little stupid, but a dear boy. He was only twelve.

'If you think,' went on Rosina, 'that he really is good and capable, why not take him to England as your servant? We should not expect any wages for him, it would be sufficient if you fed and clothed him. We are so poor we cannot buy proper food and seldom eat meat. The children do not grow up strong. It is polenta—for every meal polenta.'

She had grown quite pathetic. Riccardo had finished washing up, and was scrubbing the sink.

'No,' Rosina, I do not want a servant, nor can I take Riccardo to England. But I do believe there is good in the boy. Why don't

Riccardo and Rosina.



you send him away from home for a bit? You know you can't manage him, perhaps he would get on better amongst strangers.'

'He does not know how well off he is at home, signora. But some one is calling.'

She went to the open door and returned for a glass and a measure of wine.

I went out to see whom she was serving.

A fair-haired peasant had just drained the glass, given it to Rosina, and risen to his feet. He was a big, strong fellow. He bent down for his load, a large truss of hay carried on the back, and kept in position by an attached stick held over the right shoulder. With him was a small boy, also with a little load.

We stood watching them go. The man did not walk, but went with a slow, springy run.

'Rosina,' I said suddenly, 'that must be very heavy——'

'Giuseppe!' she shouted, 'how much hay have you?'

'Seventy-five kilos,' he shouted back.

'He has carried it up from the town.'

'But impossible—it is too heavy,' I called.

He swung round, and so bent was he I could hardly see his face.

'Signora!' he shouted, 'what can a poor man do?' If the load had let him he would have shrugged his shoulders.

I knew the road, which zigzagged from the town below to the village above us. It went up, up, up at an uncomfortably steep angle with only a few yards of level walking just below San Lorenzo. In places it was shockingly bad and there was very little shade. No horse and cart could travel up it. Oxen wagons could, and donkeys. The whole walk took quite two hours.

I stood thinking of Giuseppe, waiting for him to come into sight on the piece of road above the fontana.

The sun had dipped behind the mountain edge, and I walked round the house into the narrow gorge. A little stream rushed down over stones and the grass was dotted with primroses. The steep terraces were fringed with laurel bushes, and one thousand feet below, nearly under foot, was the lake, dark peacock in the evening shadow.

It was always very peaceful there.

Up on the mountain I could hear the children calling the goats home.

A man passed along the ridge above me. It was Renzi Gheco going to the spring to fill his water-bottle. Dear grubby Gheco, he was not beautiful and his figure was that of a large-sized three-year-old child. He sometimes came in of an evening and would sit by the fire, playing the accordion with an expression of ecstatic fulfilment. He did not play well. What chords of his soul were stirred by those sounds, I do not know, but I felt it was something so holy that it must not be joked about, even in his absence.

We all liked Gheco, he was a good-natured fellow, honest but very simple. His cottage was on the other side of the gorge from San Lorenzo, and there he lived with his mother and their servant.

La Macuccia was the Mrs Malaprop of the country-side, and to the funny things she said was coupled the most horrible voice a human being was ever cursed with. It might be described as a rasping croak, but such a description still leaves the worst to the imagination.

For two whole hours that morning she had shouted at Bortolo over the wall. The flow of words had been astounding, and her voice rose and fell without a pause for Bortolo to put in a word. He, poor tried man, by nature tolerant and polite, so far forgot himself as to try to outshout her when her remarks became too outrageous.

My irritation at the interminable clatter had been mitigated by amusement at Bortolo's ineffectual repartee.

At last he retreated and came indoors, hot and agitated.

'Oh, what a woman!' he had said.

'What is it all about?'

'Signora, there is a path through her fields to the Campo Santo. The procession passed along it when the priest blessed the fields. It is my duty to see that the path is kept tidy and the grass mown. I cut it this morning and carried the grass home. La Macuccia says the grass belongs to her. But it is my reward for keeping the place in order. She is crazy. Ecco.'

'I never understand one word of what she says,' I answered.

'I never listen,' said Rosina. 'She never stops when once she starts, and there is no opportunity for an answer. Hasn't she got a beautiful voice?'

She had. I could hear her now talking to the servant.

I walked back to the house. Rosina was at the door.

'Have you seen Riccardo?' she asked.

I hadn't.

'He ought to have come long ago to milk the cow. Ah, there he is. Riccardo, make haste.'

He came running to me and flung his arms round my neck.

'Lovely signora,' he cried, 'give me just one kiss, and I will be happy.'

He had such an enchanting smile.

When at last Castelli Bortolo came in from work we sat round the fire and talked. He took great pains to make himself understood, for my knowledge of Italian was limited, but I soon found that his was also. A great many of his words and expressions were neither in the dictionary nor the grammar.

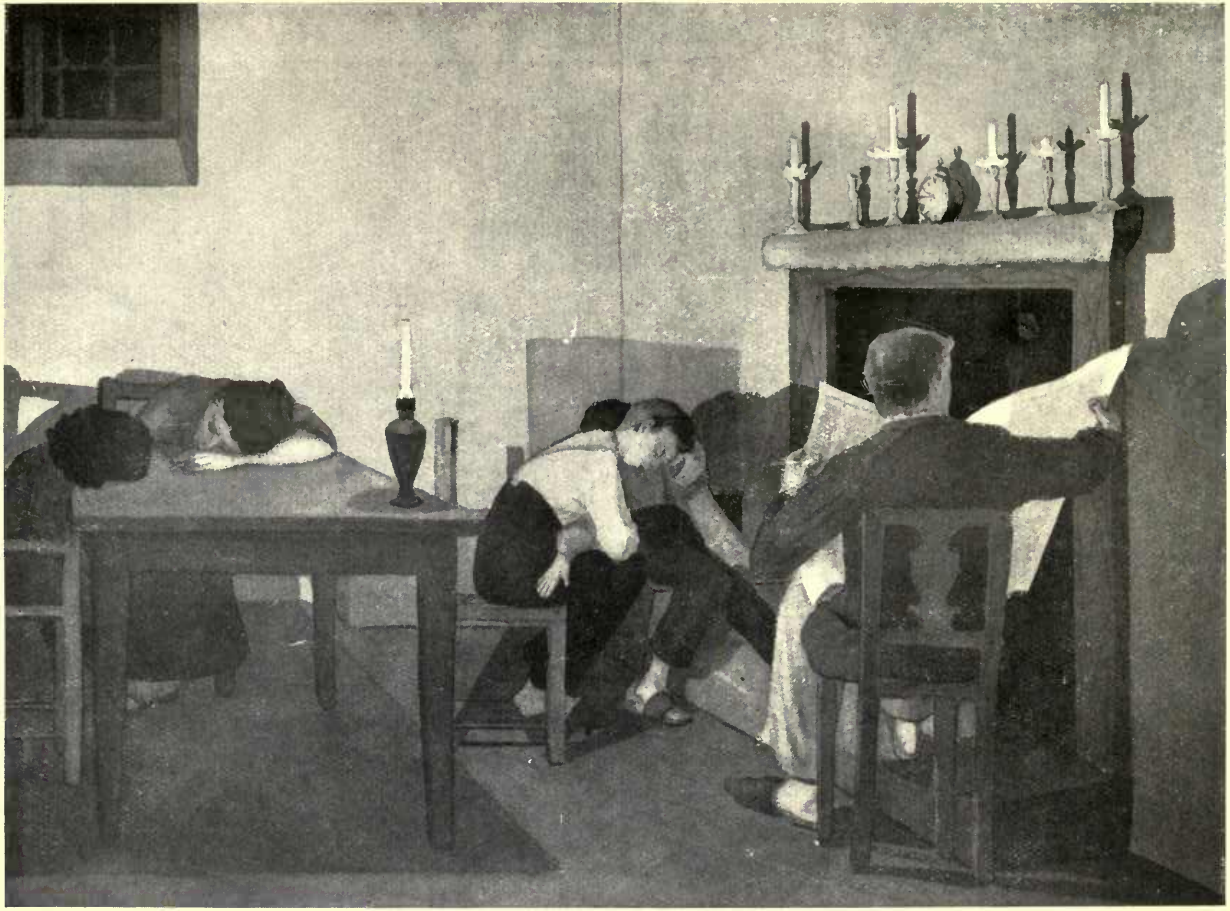
Rosina would come to my rescue.

'My husband is ignorant,' she would say, 'he talks the dialect to you. When he says " el piru " he means " la forchetta." Ecco.'

It was very confusing.

Amongst themselves the peasants always talked the dialect. To me they talked what they thought was Italian, but it was nothing better than dialect diluted with Italian. Rosina, who had formerly been in service in some of the large towns, was one of the few who could talk Italian well.

It was not very long before I began to study the dialect. At first Bortolo thought it beneath the dignity of a lady to learn the language of the poor, but as I persisted he grew interested, and taught me what he could. I wrote down the strange words, and in time I could understand and make myself understood. But I never stopped marvelling at the dialect. It had a small vocabulary, but the words were a jumble from everywhere. The greater part of them were abbreviated Italian words or disfigured derivations. I never knew words could deteriorate so. But not all the words were Italian. Many were Latin, others like French, Rumanian, German,



An Evening at San Lorenzo.

and Russian. The more I studied the dialect the more interesting it became.

Bortolo had been four years in California, but he showed no trace of any Americanism. Had he not told me I would not have guessed it. The returned emigrants of other nationalities I have seen have always something American about them. Not so Bortolo; he went and returned the same good old Bortolo.

He would tell me of the life in California and the gold mine, and the long journey with a three days' delay in Paris. And how frightened he had been of the traffic, especially of the motors, so that he had never walked farther than the end of the block. He had felt much safer indoors.

He liked to air his English on me; but his vocabulary was limited, and the few words he remembered epitomised those four years of his life. He could say: eight hour an' no more, job, boss, all de sam', maybe, big, dog, bread and cheese, beans, drink, go 'ome, sleep, shoot, and, of course, dollar and cent, both of which he only used in the singular.

One evening he said 'Wammair.'

I was stupid and couldn't understand. The whole family waited breathless to know whether the mistake was his or mine.

'Wammair,' repeated Bortolo, 'if two men were looking at something and you were passing, what would you say?'

At last I guessed. 'What's the matter!'

Bortolo was delighted. 'I am so glad you understand, but in America we say "wammair." There is a difference between English and American, as you doubtless notice,' he added loftily, for the benefit of the listeners.

But usually there were no listeners. Riccardo had been overpowered with sleep long ago, and was fast asleep on Paolino's shoulder. Paolino was fast asleep too. He was the elder son, a miniature Bortolo in every way.

Little Pina was asleep with her head on the table, Rosina never dreaming of putting her to bed before she fell asleep. Halfway through the evening she would awaken her and insist on the sleepy child saying good-night. Often as not she stubbornly refused, and Rosina would cuff her until she was sufficiently awake to see her error. Then she would go whining up to bed, Rosina following with a candle and an enormous warming-pan. When she came down, she would usually go to sleep herself, leaning on the table.

It was ten o'clock and I said I must go to bed. Bortolo would not hear of it—it was too early.

'But aren't you tired?' I asked. 'You have been picking olives all day, I am sure you get up very early.'

'I got up at four, signora.'

Rosina raised her head from the table and tried to open her eyes, but the lamp dazzled them.

'Signora,' she said with closed eyes, 'think of it, he never sleeps more than five hours. And I, I can sleep eight or even nine.'

She dropped her head on her arms.

'And do you never sleep in the day?' I asked. 'Do you work from four until eight at night?'

'Yes, signora, I sleep, perhaps, if it is hot after dinner——'

He lit my candle and stood holding it.

'Signora Antonia, a favour.' He bowed like a nobleman.

'Well?'

'When you get upstairs, signora, and I know you *will* have one window open, would you mind opening the one on that side instead of the one here?' He pointed to the walls.

'But why? I open that one because of the draught. The other window is just by my head, and I might catch a chill.'

'But it is from this window that you will catch the chill. The mountain air is unhealthy—and that window opens more towards the mountain. If I, signora, slept with that window open, I would be dead or catch a cold.'

'And you really believe the air is different on the other side of the house?'

'Signora, there is a great difference.'

'But you know I've had that window open all the time——'

'I have thought of it every night.'

'——and both of us keep as well as can be.'

'You are both as strong as soldiers.'

Rosina had roused herself and was shaking Paolino and Riccardo. Yawning and stretching they went off to bed in a half-dazed condition.

Bortolo handed me the candle and bade me good-night.

As I went up he turned to Rosina and said confidentially :—

'These English seem able to stand anything.'

Then he took up the newspaper and put on his spectacles.

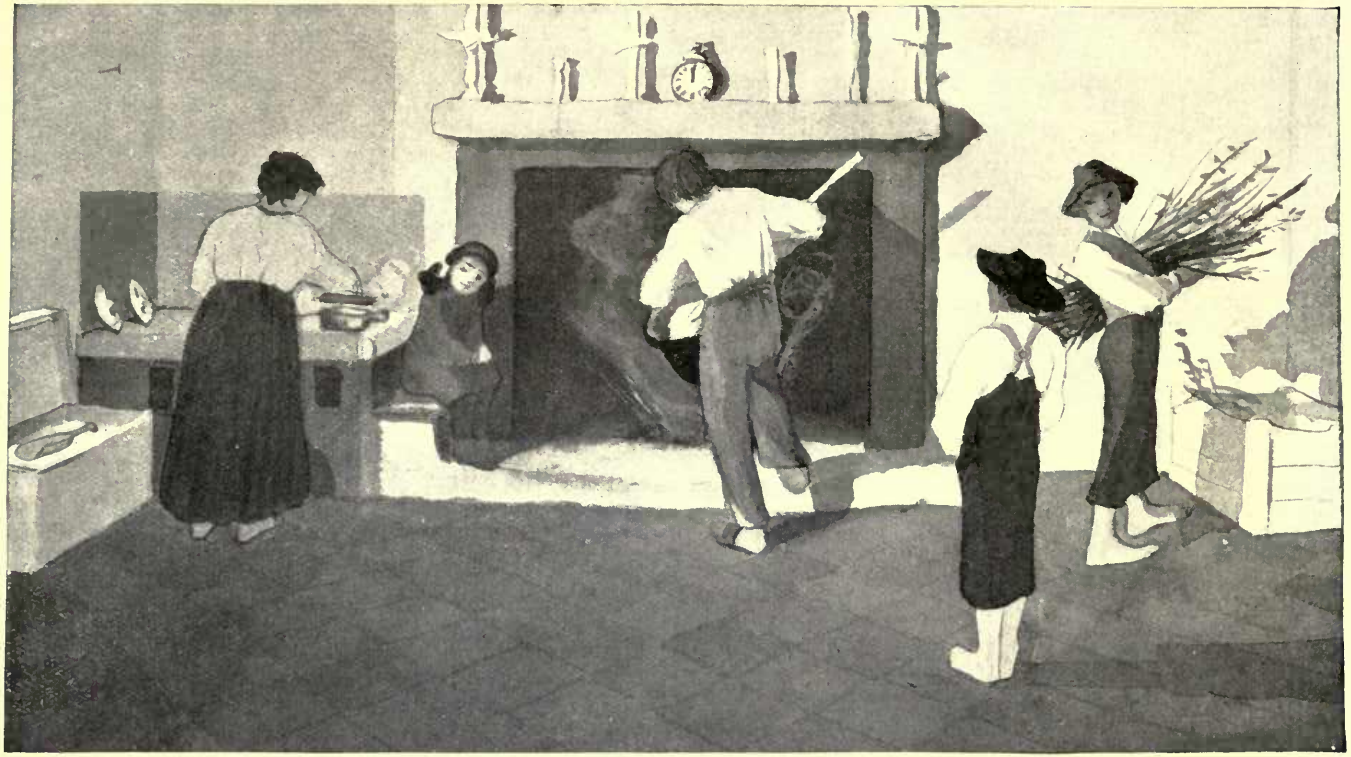
Rosina had the habit of treating Bortolo as if he was a fool. She was quicker than he was, and his slowness irritated her. He was a refined, thoughtful man, perhaps too lenient of others' failings to be quite just. I never heard him speak ill of any one or swear, unless occasion demanded. Rosina was quite different. She was impulsive

and easily shouted, and when in a fury her tongue would get the upper hand and her words became foul and unreasonable. But that did not happen often and the coarseness that was always there lay hidden. She was very capable and her advice was worth listening to. If anything was wrong among her set in the village, they would come to Rosina, and she knew exactly what ought to be done.

Perhaps Bortolo was too easy-going and contented. His soul was wrapped up in the fields. He gloried in the growth and vigour of his plants; working early and late.

He seldom came indoors except to snatch a meal and also to cook it. For the men usually prepare the polenta. It is made of maize-meal sprinkled into boiling, salted water, and it is so stiff to stir and in such a large cauldron, that it is man's work to prepare it. When cooked it is tipped out of the cauldron on to a board, and stands there very much like a bright yellow suet pudding. Rosina would cut it into slices with a thread. I think Bortolo had polenta for every meal. In the morning he broke it into his soup, at midday it was cooked and eaten in large quantities with a scrap of meat or fish, for supper he broke it into his soup again, and if he was ever hungry in between whiles, he would eat it cold. Rosina shared any tit-bits with the children. He would protest if she put anything 'nice' on his plate. The only thing I ever saw him eat with pleasure, besides polenta, was green vegetables.

Paolino was his constant companion, but he did not seem to care so much for his other children. Riccardo was a continual source of annoyance to him, he could not understand that love for loafing. It was an annoyance, too, to Rosina, and I'm sure Riccardo made



Bortolo Stirring the Polenta.

her suffer, but there is no doubt that she loved him more than all the others. Riccardo was the apple of her eye. Neither seemed to care so much for little Pina. Perhaps it was difficult to love her. She was a trivial little thing with a tiny nose.

I was awakened by a roaring sound. I sat up in the dark and listened. A door banged. The windows rattled.

It was the wind roaring down the mountain-side. I quickly closed the window.

In the dim light without I could see trees bowed down, lashed by their own branches. Olive-trees stood like ghosts, white with upturned leaves. The long grass bent and lifted.

I was very frightened. I had never experienced such wind before. The house staggered as each blast tugged it; it creaked and groaned. Each moment I expected we should be blown along the grass and dropped down the precipice beyond. Nothing seemed impossible as it blustered round the house.

My door flew open.

Almost immediately Rosina, in fluttering nightdress, rushed into the room. She opened my window and closed the outside shutters. Then she hastened away.

I felt still more frightened. My room was now dark. It was like a prison and I felt out of contact with what was going on without. The noise was terrific. I would have opened the shutters if I had dared, but if the house were blown inside-out Rosina would say it was my fault. My room was really rather sheltered, it was the other side which got the full force of the gale.

I sat up and listened, expecting I don't know what. I firmly

made up my mind never to stay on a mountain again if I should survive the night. . . .

Then came a prolonged crash that dominated everything. I thought it was a boulder that had tumbled down from above and smashed the wall. But the wall remained standing and nothing happened.

I heard voices, but Rosina did not come to my room, so I concluded nothing serious had happened after all.

I went on listening to the wind, which seemed a little less awful after the crash, or was it really less wild? Yes, the gusts were less violent—and with the same abruptness with which it had begun, it died down to a gentle breeze.

I opened the window and saw the calm stars above. The lake was in a turmoil. The sound of waves came up to me, an echo of the stormy air.

CHAPTER II

THE DANCE AT THE INN

I WAS sitting on the trunk of the olive-tree that had fallen against the house and had frightened me so last night. Bortolo and Paolino had been chopping off the smaller branches.

It was a lovely calm morning. Everything was peaceful and Sunday-like.

A man and woman had called in for a glass of wine and gone on to the town.

Riccardo had not returned. Rosina was getting anxious, but she did so every day at about half-past nine, and remained in a state of agitation until Riccardo arrived, usually at eleven or even half-past. He carried the milk down every morning at five-thirty, and in all reason ought to be back by nine o'clock. What he did during those two hours I never rightly knew, but I am afraid he loafed on the quay or by café doors, listening to men talk.

Rosina came out to look up the path again and make a gesture of despair.

'I told him to be early. The dinner will never be cooked if he does not bring the meat soon.'

Presently she came out again.

'Signora, they are dancing at the village to-night. Would you like to go?'

'Yes, I think so. Where is it to be?'

'At the house of Nino. It is the inn.'

'And you think I shall go dancing in an inn on Sunday night?'

'But why not?'

I could think of no reason.

'Tell me, Rosina, will there be nobody who has had too much wine?'

'You need have no fear,' she answered, 'at Campià they are all good boys, bravi ragazzi, it will be all right. I will go with you. If you do not like it we can come home. Riccardo and Paolino will come as well. Bortolo will look after the house.'

We arranged to go. I had become accustomed to follow Rosina's advice, for it had been invaluable. She knew what to do and when to do it.

At last Riccardo came down the path.

'Ugly creature,' she greeted him, 'did I not tell you to hurry? You will be late for mass. Here is the signora waiting for her letters. You deserve to be beaten.'

'There is no post,' said Riccardo, entirely unperturbed, and went in to put down the baskets. Then followed the inevitable loud-voiced altercation. Rosina looked at the purchases and asked the prices. Riccardo could only remember them when driven very hard, and the butcher's ticket was invariably in the pocket he had forgotten to search.

In ten minutes it was over, and he came out smiling.

'Lovely signora,' he cried, capering towards me, blithe as a kitten, 'give me a kiss and perhaps I will give you a letter.'

'No, no, give me my letter,' and I caught his arm and felt in his pockets. There was nothing in them.

'Come, my letter,' I said.

With a mischievous look he unbuttoned his coat, and there, between his braces and his heart, was a letter for me. I took it.

'The kiss, signora?'

'No, you can't have kisses always,' I answered, 'you know you ought to have given me my post at once.'

His smile faded, and he lounged against the house, hands deep in pockets, shoulders up, and sulked until Rosina found him. She soon sent him off to get ready for mass, and I could hear them talking in the bedroom.

Bortolo had gone on, but the others were waiting. Pina strutted like a peacock in her best dress, and Paolino was ill at ease. He thought his new shirt was rather too blue, and kept his coat tightly buttoned.

At last they started, Paolino and Pina holding my little girl's two hands. Riccardo brought up the rear, still sulking. Rosina and I were left at home.

'What is to be done with a boy like that, signora, he refused absolutely to wash his neck. I beat him with a stick, but it was no good and there was no time—I had to let him go, signora, like that.' She sighed. 'He is a great sorrow to his parents.'

.

I had walked through the village several times, but the outside had given me no idea of what its inner life might be. There were no windows low enough to catch a glimpse of a room and the gardens were walled in. Very few houses were on a level with the road. Steps led up to most of them, and these without doubt had stables on the ground floor, as the all too frequent manure heaps testified.

Dark tunnels and crooked passages led to courtyards at the back and more manure heaps and other houses, for the place seemed a perfect maze of planless construction. At least it seemed so to me, who had not ventured far off the road. There was a little piazza, and the church stood at one end on the very edge of the cliff, and a new wide road led back along the edge behind the houses and joined the street again. The other road led up the mountain.

Children had fled into doorways at my approach, and the few grown-up inhabitants who had not followed them, had saluted me with such polite indifference that I felt completely out of touch with them. It was an uncomfortable feeling.

Apparently no one was in the least interested. No head poked out of a window, nor round a door. But I felt that I was watched even if the eyes were invisible.

It is rude to stare, and they showed good taste to spare me. But I guessed they were human, and I knew enough of village life in remote places to know that the appearance of a stranger would be a subject for conversation.

Of course I had been seen and criticised. It was Rosina with her customary directness who told me of it. She said :—

'They are beginning to ask whether the signora has only one dress.'

Bless their hearts!

'Signora, *I* know that you have beautiful clothes, and many clothes, because you have shown them to me. But why do you always wear the same dress?'

Why indeed? It had been colder than I had expected, and it was my only thick dress. But Rosina was not pleased. She had

probably been boasting to her friends that I was a great signora of fabulous wealth from across the seas; to have me walk about in an old dress did not at all fit in with her tale.

So when I dressed for the dance I put on a white blouse, a washing one, of course. I had been to peasant dances before, not in Italy, but in Sweden. At the end of the evening I have always found a very grubby spot where my partners had held me. If that was so in Sweden it would no doubt be the same in Italy too, perhaps more so.

It was pitch dark when we started for the village, and I held Rosina's arm or I would have stumbled on the road. On the way she told me unnerving stories of a devil who beset the road—and in whom she did not believe, but some did, and I was quite pleased to reach the village.

It was dark except where a window shed its dim light into the street. The people we passed were blurred shadows. At one of the first houses a door stood open, and at the end of a long passage was a lamp-lit room and the sounds of an accordion. I expected Rosina to go in here, but she kept on. We passed the mountain road and had almost reached the piazza when she suddenly turned to the left into one of those dark tunnels. I could neither see her nor the end of that black gulf.

I hesitated, and remembered the story of the devil. Where was she taking me? I suddenly wondered whether I had not been silly to come. At the bottom of my heart I was actually a little afraid of these peasants, whose thoughts and habits were remote and incomprehensible to me.

'Signora, come on,' called Rosina, 'take courage.'

Her voice reassured me, and I followed. The tunnel sloped upwards, it was very long. I hardly knew when I was out of it, for opposite was a wall and only a little streak of sky over our heads. Before us was a house dimly lighted up.

'This,' said Rosina, 'is the house of Nino.'

I stood looking, fascinated by the frightful din.

I caught sounds of shouting, loud voices, snatches of song, and uproarious laughter.

I concluded that we should not be able to stay long!

Rosina was mounting the steps.

The room was large and entirely empty except for two men sitting at one of the tables, which had been pushed against the walls. They were Gheco and a wooden-legged man. They talked quietly over their wine.

The noise came from the kitchen, which was a little room three steps up, packed with men all talking at once. Some were seated at a table eating and the others crowded round, laughing and shouting.

As we came in some of them burst into song :—

'Tripoli, bel suol d'amore,
Ti guinga dolce, questa mia canzon.'

We spoke a few words to Gheco and sat down in a far corner and waited.

Rosina ordered some wine.

At last four men came out of the kitchen and walked leisurely across to four chairs which had evidently been occupied by them

already. They were the musicians. Sylvestri Giacomi, captain of the quartet, came first with his mandoline; then Di Marchesi Giacom, a huge fellow with a bass cello. After him the two Antonios with guitars. The elder of these was called Toni, the self-taught village organist, and the other was Tona, funny little Tona with a blind eye.

They sat down and began to tune up.

The kitchen emptied and the room filled with men, nothing but men, and all with black slouch hats on, worn rakishly or over eyes like assassins on the stage. It was not a shouting rabble that came into the room, but a sober, quiet crowd, which sat on tables or stood about, patiently awaiting the music.

And they did not wait long. Giacomi struck up a jolly polka, and it was so unexpectedly well played that for some minutes I was absorbed in watching the players.

Some one asked me to dance, but I shook my head.

I didn't really know what I ought to do. Why were there no other girls? Did they resent the presence of a foreigner? I did not wish to offend any one. Nor did I want to dance in solitary grandeur, as for Rosina, she was much too stout.

My would-be partner did not understand me, and Rosina leant forward to hear what I was saying.

'Tell him,' I said, 'that I do not wish to dance before the other girls come.'

A curly-haired fellow standing close by answered me in English.

'De women come direckly dey put away de supper. I go call dem.'

Outsiders dropped in and the walls were lined with spectators.

The curly-haired man, who was called Raimondo, returned with two girls. Others soon followed, and we danced.

Who could sit still when that music played? Toni and Tona twanged the guitars in perfect time, never taking their eyes off the dancers. Giacomi was more serious, whilst Giacom grappled manfully with the bass, which he had only just learnt to play.

I danced with many partners, and several times with the same ones. I had expected that Gheco would have asked me for one of the first dances, for he knew me and the others didn't. But he was too modest to take an advantage like that. However, we danced several times together later in the evening. I also had the wooden-legged man for a partner and he danced amazingly well. His black eyes were limpid like a well in the woods—they were most extraordinary eyes.

At the end of a dance my partner would shake hands with me, saying, 'Thank you,' then, still keeping my hand, would lead me to my chair, and say thank you again, adding, 'excuse me.' The excuse was for dancing badly and for any fault in manners that might have been made.

Partners never conversed between the dances, and there was no attempt at what we would call sitting out or at flirtation.

In between whiles Rosina brought several of her friends to me. 'This is Bertoldi Lucia, the wife of Toni, who is playing the guitar.' She was a dark, unkempt creature, with an interesting face. In her arms was a grubby baby asleep. Another of her children sat on the curb of the fireplace, another was the dark beauty over there—and the tall young man with the crooked nose. There were several more children, six in all, and I forget how many had died.

'This is Giacomina.'

In spite of her years I could see a young soul shine in her eyes. She loved dancing, and we danced together at once.

'Giacomina's husband is in America,' went on Rosina, when we came back, 'and has been there six years. She has three children. That is her son, Costante, dancing with the tall young man with the crooked nose. Here comes her sister, Julietta. Her husband's also in America, he left five years ago, when Pierrino was a baby. His name is Umberto, and is the brother of Teresina, who is Nino's wife, (we are in their house now), and Nino is the brother of Giacomina and Julietta, and the sister of Teresina is that red-haired woman, you know, who married Giacom, who plays the bass cello.'

I couldn't follow.

'Bertoldi Gaetano over there is also a brother of Giacomina and Nino.'

I had danced with Gaetano. He was a merry little fellow. He had spoken a few English words, and had told me that he too had been several years in America.

Giacomina spoke to me.

'Signora,' she said, 'you are enjoying yourself?'

'Yes, yes, very much.'

She went off, telling others what I had said, and every one seemed very pleased.

I felt amongst friends.

My fears were all gone. I was as keen on the whole thing as they were. Dim was yesterday, dimmer still to-morrow. Forgotten were heavy loads and empty larders. As far as they were concerned,

the whole world was enclosed in those four walls. Nothing mattered whilst they danced.

A woman with an enamel basin full of water was splashing it over the floor, to lay the dust. Whilst dancing we had ground a considerable amount of red powder out of the tiled floor. Gaetano was refilling glasses.

There were many onlookers. Some sat on the forms which stood against the walls, leaning their arms on the tables, others sat on the tables themselves. All the women were bareheaded, but every man wore a hat, whether he danced or no. Some spoke and laughed, others were immovably intent. Old men and old women were there who had danced in this room long ago, and there were children who ought to have been in bed. Two of the girls were real beauties, the one Catina, Giacomina's daughter, stood by her lover, Conrado, whilst Ghita, who had no lover, was trying to keep her young sisters in order. They were cheeking her.

A small man came and stood with his back to the table by me. He leant against it, watching critically. His face was quite serious, only his eyes glittered with amusement.

'Rosina,' I whispered, 'who is that?'

'That? It is Nino, Bertoldi Nino.'

'Doesn't he dance?'

'I think so, would you like to dance with him?'

'Yes, if he asks me.'

'Nino!' Rosina called out, 'the signora wishes to dance with you.'

How could she be so tactless!

Nino looked round smiling and explained that he danced badly, 'but—of course—if the signora wished it——'

I did wish it, and we danced. He shut his mouth tight and said nothing, but the look in his eye, being translated into English, expressed 'what a lark!'

Rosina told me that Nino had been in America with her husband. Nearly every one seemed to have been in America. I spoke English to him, but he shook his head. He knew even less than Bortolo.

Rosina interrupted.

'Signora, this is Teresina, the wife of Nino.'

She offered me a glass of wine.

'Teresina,' went on Rosina, bent on muddling me still further, 'is the sister of Agnese, who married Giacom, who——'

But I didn't listen.

Teresina nudged Nino.

'Ask the signora if she is enjoying herself.'

I assured her that I was.

She smiled all over. 'Then we are contented.'

I danced again with the wooden-legged man and with Raimondo. But there is an end to all things. The last dance was played, and the players rose. The room was full of people standing.

Rosina and I left at once, leaving the others to talk and finish their wine. It was nearly eleven o'clock.

Riccardo and Paolino joined us at the door, and we plunged together into that dark tunnel which seemed fearful no longer.

Riccardo took my arm and we walked on in front, Rosina and Paolino a few yards behind. We passed through the village, the accordion was still playing, and we caught sight of dancers through the open door.

We walked on gaily enough. Rosina was trying to find out how

I liked it all, telling me that every one had said I was a signora molta simpateca.

Two blurred figures came towards us, clothed in long cloaks. They were not like anything I'd seen on the road before, and it was not until they were quite close that I saw who they were. Riccardo should have known. Rosina being in the rear could not see them.

After all, it was nothing very extraordinary, only two policemen. Rosina stopped and looked after them.

'Police,' she whispered hoarsely, 'police.'

'It is too late to do anything now——' said Paolino.

She stood bolt upright in the road and thought.

Riccardo's hand had tightened on my arm.

'Police,' he echoed, in awed voice.

'*Madre mia*,' groaned Rosina, 'we can do nothing. Signora, think of Nino—supposing——'

'Rosina, do tell me what it's about.'

She looked back again before going on.

'Signora,' she answered, 'it is prohibited to dance at inns.'

Good Heavens!

'We don't know—perhaps they have gone home. Let us hope the musicians have—in any case it is past ten o'clock.'

'Past ten o'clock?'

'Yes, signora, ten o'clock is closing time. Let us hope for the best. Whatever put it in their heads to come up—at this time of night? It is incredible.'

The rest of the way we walked in silence. Rosina thought of Nino, and I that the whole thing had been unlawful from beginning

to end. I was tired, and bidding Rosina good-night I went straight upstairs.

The sight of my room and my things brought me back to realities. How entirely they had been forgotten whilst I danced. . . .

A cool breeze blew in through my window.

I could hear Rosina telling Bortolo downstairs.

'This has been a most remarkable evening,' I thought.

I found it still more remarkable when I took off my blouse and found that it was perfectly clean.

CHAPTER III

THE VILLAGE

NEXT morning Rosina and I were talking in the kitchen when Nino came. She was fanning the charcoal fire with a large piece of torn cardboard.

He began talking to her at once in the dialect, and I was unable to follow. But I could see something was wrong, for they both got very excited and gesticulated freely. Nino seemed aged since yesterday, doubtless he had a sleepless night, and his frequent use of the word 'police' told me the rest.

This is what had happened. When the police came up the village street they passed the house where I had heard the accordion. Bigi was standing at the door, and tried to persuade the police to come in, but they would not do so. To dance in a private house is quite lawful, and they had somehow got wind of the dance at the inn. Whilst they paused to answer Bigi, Julietta caught sight of them standing in the bar of light from the passage. She was higher up the street, and ran as fast as she could to Nino's house. 'Boys,' she shouted at the door, 'boys, run, the police!'

There was a rush for the door, every one scuttling up a back path leading to the mountain road.

Nino blew the lamp out.

Then the police came, and finding the door open, marched in.

Standing in the middle of a pitch dark room, apparently doing nothing, were Nino, Teresina, Gaetano, and the old father.

Now the door of an inn must always be locked after closing time, which is ten o'clock. So the police had not come up in vain. Nino was to be summoned for having the door open. And there would be a fine to pay, thirty lire at the very least—more likely it would be fifty. An enormous sum for poor Nino as his white face told me.

And what put it into the heads of the police to come up? They themselves said that some one had been to the police station and given information that there was to be dancing at the inn.

One could but guess who had done such a thing, and Nino thought he knew. That same morning a man, very much the worse for liquor, had come to the inn and had had words with Nino, had insulted him, and Nino had refused to serve him with more wine. The man's wife had come, and taking up the quarrel, scolded Nino most unjustly and went off in a tearing rage. After dinner she had gone to the town. In all probability it was she who had revenged herself by informing the police.

It was bad enough, but it might have been worse.. They might have been caught dancing, and the police knew, and every one knew, that they had danced. But it couldn't be proved.

Dancing is only allowed in a licensed house which has two public rooms.

We saw a good deal of Nino during the following weeks, whilst he was waiting to be summoned to court. He came nearly every day to pour his troubles into Rosina's sympathetic ears, and when he was not there, she would sigh over her work, and say, 'Poor Nino, poor Nino.' She was sorry for him, and so was I. He grew thinner

and paler every day, and it was hard to see him and not be touched by it.

'We are all so sorry,' said Bortolo, 'because Nino is a man who works hard and always has bad luck.'

'And when the hailstorm comes, signora,' went on Rosina, 'it is always his fields that are most spoilt. Last year when we gave up our licence it was transferred to Nino; we all thought it would be a good thing and bring in a little money. Now he is to be fined!'

'But surely they will make a collection for him?' I asked.

Bortolo shook his head. 'No, signora, it is not the custom here. In America, yes, they pass the hat round. But here every one would look the other way. It could not be done.'

'He has other troubles too,' said Rosina. 'He was in America two years with Bortolo, as you know, and he saved all his money and sent home enough to pay off the family debts. The money he sent home afterwards was to be put in the bank for him. Signora, he sent 3000 lire in all, and when Nino came back he found hardly a penny left. His father had drawn it out and spent it. That is all very well, but the father is now making his will and wishes to leave all his property to his daughters. But Nino thinks that as he has given his father so much money, he, too, deserves a share. It is only just. But the old man has a hard heart. Nino and Giacomina are like their mother. She was soft-hearted and suffered much. Gaetano is more like his father, things don't go deep into him. When they were all children they were so poor they didn't know what a halfpenny looked like. It is true, signora. Even now you seldom see butcher's meat in Nino's house, perhaps a frittura on Sunday, but otherwise polenta and cheese, polenta and cheese, and polenta and cheese. Sometimes

a rabbit or a bird Nino has shot. Ah, they are not extravagant, and he does not spend his money in wine. But he works always, and always. He knows everything about the work and how to make and mend things. Bortolo is continually going to him for advice.'

Rosina paused to chase three hens from the kitchen, flapping her apron at them.

'Signora, last year he insured his vines and after the hailstorm wrote to the company. But he did not do so in time, for the company did not receive his letter within twenty-four hours of the storm, which is one of the rules. They refused to pay him a penny. So he lost money on that.'

'How did it come about that he is blind in one eye?'

'When he was a little fellow,' she answered, 'he stuck a penknife into it. And you have noticed the bald patches on his head? It was an accident, boiling water was spilt over him. He nearly died. Poor fellow, he is unhappy too, because Gaetano is returning to America. We are all so fond of Gaetano, he is so jolly.'

'Nino does not seem to have been very fortunate.'

'No, signora, poor Nino, two of his children are dead, and they only have that one little boy.'

.

I often went to the inn. Teresina made excellent lemon-squash, and she would let me sit in the kitchen, which was a fine place for watching the customers in the public room.

She would sit knitting stockings, and smile at me now and then, but she was very shy of talking. She was so sure I would not understand her. If Nino was there she would ask him to say things to me

for her. He was always ready to talk and very anxious to be understood and to understand me. And he was always interesting. His little four-year-old son would sit on his knee and when he was not talking Nino would kiss his head and stroke him. Both Nino and Teresina adored Battisti, but he was a stubborn little chap. He absolutely refused to speak to me or even to say good-morning. In vain his father threatened and his mother attempted to bribe him. It was impossible to make him do it.

On Sunday afternoons the place was always full of men, and Nino would be playing cards which bored him. It was part of his duty as innkeeper to make up a fourth, then the guests would remain longer and drink more wine. But if they sat a long time and ordered nothing, Nino himself would call for a quart. After all, it was his own house, and one cannot be inhospitable. . . .

Besides cards, the men would play murra. This is a game in which you shout and bang the table, and is so noisy it can be heard right down the street. I wondered that it might be played in an inn.

Four men take part in it, two on a side, the sides sitting opposite each other at a table. A man from each side raises his right hand and together they bang their hands on the table in rapid succession. For each bang they hold out a different number of fingers and shout a number. The one who has called the right number of fingers of both hands added together has won a point. He marks the score by holding out a finger on his left hand. Then he plays with his two adversaries alternately until he loses. Fifteen points wins the game. Murra is called instead of ten, when all fingers are spread out.

It is quite simple, but one must be smart. Your hand must be on the table at the same moment as your adversary's; if you are



Sunday at the Inn.

before him he will count your fingers and call the right number, and you will be at a disadvantage if you put out your fingers before the last moment. His eyes never leave your hand. You, too, must watch him or he will cheat. It is best to remember his score as well as your own.

They bang the table in such quick succession that you can hardly see to count the fingers. And the more exciting it is, the louder they shout and the harder they bang, and during the short respite when some one scores a point, they all swear.

I never saw women play this game of murra, and only very seldom did I see a woman take a hand at cards. And I never saw any gambling. The only other game played in the village was La Balla, which is also only a man's game. It is played in the street on Sundays after the afternoon service. The villagers watch the game with great interest, sitting in groups on doorsteps or on the road or standing in a knot at the turning where the players scuffle for the ball. Careful people close the wooden shutters or the windows might be smashed, and the smaller children are kept out of the way.

Half-way between the piazza and the turning, a sort of drum is placed in the middle of the road. It is like a large tambourine. A spadeful of sand and a few stones keep it in place. The player who is to hit the ball stands here, the others face him up at the turning. They have taken off their shoes and are ready.

The hitter steps backwards.

'Balla,' he calls out, and running forward bounces the ball on the drum, and hits it up the street with the palm of his hand as hard as he can. The street is very narrow and a little crooked, and the ball does not always go straight. Sometimes it falls on a roof and is

a long while dropping or never drops at all, or it goes higher still and falls into a backyard. But usually it hits a wall and rebounds up the street to where the players await it. Those of the opposite side try to hit it back towards the drum, the others try to get it higher up the street. The ball may touch the walls or roof of a house, but it must not touch the ground. There is an exciting moment whilst the ball is being hit backwards and forwards. When at last it falls to the ground the place is marked with a leafy twig and the score is called out.

Then the man at the drum takes another short run and hits the ball again. This time it must touch the ground beyond the leafy twig if his side is to win; if the ball comes on the near side he loses, and must give up his place to an opponent.

The balls are hard and small, the size of golf balls. They have more than half a dozen to play with, so that they may not wait whilst boys are searching for lost balls. But there are other interruptions.

The village fountain is at the turning, and cattle are brought to drink at the trough, and goats and sheep. Filip's oxen take a long time to meander up the road and back again, and of course the game must be stopped for every passer-by.

They play it until it is too dark to see. Then the younger men try to get up a dance. Usually five or six club together and form a company, as they call it, and agree to divide the expenses. They ask permission to dance in one of the rooms which have a smooth brick floor—and there are not many such floors in the village, and the musicians are asked to play, and are given as much wine as they choose to drink during the evening, in return for their services. The

table is pushed on one side or lifted into the passage, and chairs placed for the players.

All the girls are expected to come to a dance, and as many onlookers as like may crowd the walls, but it is not good form for a man to come and dance the whole evening unless he has arranged with the company to take a share in the expenses, or been invited by them. This keeps the room from getting too crowded, but if it is large and there are plenty of girls, the company will let every one dance and they never mind a man dancing once or twice. Girls very frequently dance together, and so do men.

At seven o'clock the room empties and they all go to their respective homes for supper, but before long they are back again and keep up the dance until ten or eleven o'clock. No one thinks of leaving until the players rise and make for the door. Often as not they are entreated for one more dance, but when they do go, every one else does. The company, however, remain behind to square accounts.

They add up the cost of wine, the hire of the room, and the paraffin lamp. The sum is divided equally amongst them and they pay up at once to the man who had undertaken to fetch the wine. Members of the company often bring wine or liqueurs to treat their friends, but this is at their own expense, and has nothing to do with the company's expenses.

I once waited with Rosina whilst they squared accounts. Renzi Gheco was one of the company and had asked to walk home with us. No villager liked to walk down that devil-infested road in the dark, and if we had not waited for him, I am sure Gheco would have walked home with a lighted candle in his hand. I don't mean a lantern, but just a candle which would go out at every gust, and

spatter wax on his clothes. I never saw him leave San Lorenzo after dark without taking a candle from his pocket, or else borrowing one from Rosina. I never understood whether he carried it to enable him to see, or whether he thought it would frighten the devil away. Perhaps it made him think of the candles in church, and gave him a feeling of divine protection.

On this occasion we waited for a quarter of an hour whilst the company struggled with mental arithmetic. There were four of them and the sum to be divided was 3 lire 60 cents. But it took a good deal of argument to agree even on that point. I remember the room cost one lire and the rest was for wine and the lamp. Then 3 lire 60 cents had to be divided by four. Raimondo, who was quick, upset the other three's calculation by announcing the right sum before they had half done it, which threw them out completely, and instead of doing the sum again they began to argue that Raimondo was wrong. Raimondo tried to prove he wasn't, and they all talked at once. Then one of them had a quiet think, and came to the conclusion that the amount was 85 cents, which made Raimondo do the sum again. By this time Gheco suggested 95 cents, whereat Raimondo shouted they were all crazy, and did the sum out loud for them. But Gheco, who wouldn't own defeat, explained that he had arrived at that sum, because he had added it all up from the beginning and had found that 3 lire 60 cents was wrong. So they were back again at that point.

Of course it was amicably settled at last to the satisfaction of every one but the man who still insisted his share was 85 cents. He was quite dejected over that halfpenny, and no one had any sympathy for him.

We walked down with Gheco, and he left us at the path that led to his cottage.

'Gheco seems very happy,' I said to Rosina, after he had gone.

'Ah, signora, he has his love,' she answered, 'his Apollonia.'

Apollonia was La Macuccia's servant.

'But I thought Tona was courting her,' I said, remembering having witnessed a delicious flirtation between them in La Macuccia's kitchen. Apollonia had been sewing, and Tona, perched up on the bench by the fire, was curling his little moustaches, and his one eye looked at her with embarrassing appreciation. Apollonia was giggling. La Macuccia, silent for once, sat knitting at the window, and Gheco seemed quite out of it. Perhaps he was jealous and repented having asked Tona to help him in the fields. But it was all right now. Apollonia had accepted Gheco, and Tona had withdrawn from the field, vanquished. But it still remained to be seen what Apollonia's relatives would say about it.

CHAPTER IV

THE RIDGE OF HOUSES

RICCARDO had become very gloomy of late. He dawdled more than ever, and took to sitting by the fireplace, brooding. Threats and blows had no effect on him. Sometimes he would rouse himself and behave like a mad thing, caper about, pull Pina's hair, and pinch my little girl until she shrieked. Then he burst into wild song, and ended up with an idiotic 'he-he!'

I thought he was ill, and told Rosina so. She shook her head.

'I do not know what the matter is, but he is not ill,' she said.

Paolino giggled.

'Riccardo is in love,' he explained, 'he has proposed to Albina and been rejected. You know Albina, that girl with the plaits? He walks up from town with her. She only laughs at him.'

I'm afraid we also found Riccardo's broken heart rather amusing.

'When I was that age,' said Rosina, 'I thought of other things.'

I looked at her and wondered.

She went out and stood at the door calling him: 'Riccardo, Riccardo, imbecile, fa prest. . . .'

What a little nuisance Riccardo was. The whole place was poisoned by that shouting. If the olive-trees could have spoken, they would have said 'Riccardo.' In his more amiable moments he pestered me for kisses, and continually touched or embraced me.

I wondered if he was so stupid. He was very cunning. I began to understand why he dawdled, there was reason in it. He was never allowed to be idle. It was never 'you may run and play when you've done this.' As soon as one task was completed he was put to a new one. After supper he had to wash up, whereupon he fell asleep over the fire. First thing in the morning he carried the milk down to the town. To dawdle was the way to save himself from being overworked. Of course he carried it too far, and I am not trying to defend him, but I mention it as a principle to which most boys in Campià resorted. They were all shouted at and driven to work. I would have felt more sympathy for Riccardo if he had shirked his work or run away in order to do something else. But he never did anything else. He was just round the corner, hands in pockets, loafing or perhaps sitting in the swing, but not swinging. He quite preferred to sit in the swing, if it meant forcibly ejecting one of the little girls. His favourite place was by the kitchen fire, and he would sit and gaze at the ashes if there was no fire, and take no notice whatever of the repeated calls.

Bortolo so loved work that he expected his boys to do so as well. Paolino worked very hard and willingly, but Riccardo—what a disappointment he was. Rosina did not treat him very judiciously. One minute she was whacking him mercilessly, the next she was spoiling and petting him. No wonder Paolino thought it a little unjust. He had to do his own work and half of Riccardo's as well.

There was Rosina, calling him again, dwelling with great weight on each word :—

'Riccardo—brutta figura—ignorante—villano—ma perchè'

She said a lot more, but I walked off to the Ridge of Houses. The path skirted the top of the little gorge where the water trickled and wound in and out amongst olive-trees, past Gheco's cottage and up on to the ridge.

Gheco's wheat was growing tall, and flowers blossomed everywhere. It was a lovely day and the weather had been sunny for over a month. Rain was badly needed. Bortolo looked at the sky every morning and predicted no rain. He always knew what the weather would be, and I only once remember his making a mistake. On that occasion a thunderstorm drenched me. He would say at seven o'clock in the morning, 'It will rain after dinner'—and it would.

I felt a sudden jar as I caught sight of La Macuccia. She was on the path, leading a goat which wanted to browse amongst Gheco's wheat. I hoped she would not detain me long, but I was disappointed. She had a great deal to say, and I could just about understand one-fifth of it. It made no difference to her flow of words if I said, 'I do not understand,' she went on just the same. Latterly I had adopted the habit of saying 'Yes, yes, how very nice,' whenever she expected me to put in a word, and we usually got on famously like that.

To-day she told me a long yarn about Apollonia, and stopped abruptly when I said 'How very nice.'

'But I am telling you, signora, that he is dead. . . .'

'Dead—who is dead?' I asked in consternation.

'It is the father of Apollonia—she has gone home—he died last night—we had a message—it will be several days before she returns —I am alone and have little opportunity for conversation—she took



Cristofolo Crossing the Ridge of Houses.

some clothes with her and her hat. . . .' and so on, in that screechy voice.

At last I escaped and went up to the Ridge of Houses.

It is an open, flattish place, covered with heaps of stones and a precipice on two sides of it. There is hardly any shade, and only a few young cypress-trees grow there, but a gentle breeze fans the ridge even on the hottest day. The view is wonderful. You can see right across to the plains.

But there are no houses. The heaps of stones are all that remain of a little village, which stood there long ago until the days of the Plague. Then the pestilence came and killed off every single inhabitant. No one was left, and no one took their place, and the houses stood empty a very long time, until they fell to ruin. The name is forgotten.

Perhaps Gheco's cottage stood on the outskirts, and of course the fontana belonged to it, the one where the women wash clothes, which is close by. The church is said to have stood a little below, on Nino's land, where silver candlesticks and other relics have been dug up.

Campià nearly shared the same fate. The Plague claimed its victims there too, and the stricken inhabitants dragged a barrel of wine into the piazza, and bade every one drink and keep up his heart. Whether they kept up their hearts, I do not know, but it is certain they did not keep away the Plague. They died, one after the other, and in the end there were only three left. These three were men, and the descendants of two of them, Bertoldi and Castelli, are very numerous in the village at the present day. The third's descendants seem lately to have died out.

I saw Nino at work close by, and went to see what he was at. He had a little cotton bag containing maize and bean seeds mixed together.

He took a handful and scattered them on the ground. Then he broke up the soil with a pick.

'Is that the way you sow seeds?' I asked, perhaps a little surprised.

'Is it not a good way?'

'In England,' I answered, 'we dig up the soil first.'

'Perhaps it would be better, but I have no time to do that. I have too much land.'

He took his long-stemmed pipe from his upper waistcoat pocket, and filled it from a little leather bag kept in his trouser pocket.

We walked back to the gate which opens on to the Ridge of Houses. In the shade lay a large water-bottle and his coat and some of his tools. He looked back at the vines.

'It simply won't rain, ostia,'[1] he said.

'The vines look fine,' I said.

'Yes, signora, there will be many grapes this year—but of course—when the hail comes . . .' he shrugged his shoulders. 'Every year it comes, in July or August, and the crops are ruined . . .'

'But not *always*?' I asked.

'Every year, signora, it hails not only once, but sometimes twice, and what isn't destroyed by the first storm is done for by the second . . . but sometimes it is not so bad, it depends on the wind. Last year only one-third of the crops were spoilt down here, but up at the

[1]This is a bad oath.

fields by Campià everything was devastated. The storm is usually worst up there. You should see it, the grapes are torn from the vines and strewn on the ground, whole bunches of them, and the leaves are wrenched off, and the plants stand naked. They all suffer, the olives and the maize too. In ten minutes it is all spoilt. Goddam,' he added fiercely in English.

I listened half incredulously.

'You don't believe it, but it is quite true. You see,' he went on, relighting his pipe, 'it isn't that the soil is bad, it's very good, and the plants are strong and healthy and we all work hard and ought to do well. But then the hail comes—and all our work has been in vain.'

'And the Government, does it do nothing for you?'

'Nothing, signora.'

'Nor any one else?'

'No, signora.'

'Well, what happens?'

'One year in ten we have a good harvest, and then we make a little money. But the other years——'

'But you make so much that you have enough to eat?'

'No, signora.'

'But, Nino, what do you do?'

He became very serious.

'When it is a bad year there is no money and no wine,' he said reminiscently, in a low tone. 'So we eat polenta and drink water. We don't die, because that is sufficient to keep us alive. The shops in the town give us credit. That is how we run into debt, and are forced to go to America. . . . And when it's a bad year like that,

signora, we cannot work more than four days a week because we have not the strength to do more. . .'

He waited for me to speak, but as I didn't, he said :—

'Signora, it is quite true.'

'Look,' he continued, pointing with his pipe up the terraced hillside, 'my land begins at the road and runs right down to the barn below. It is good land, and I have many plants, and I have still more lands beyond the village. And I work always, always. But I cannot make it pay, I cannot make both ends meet, and if the crop fails again this year, I too must go to America.'

'And did you like being in America?'

'Signora, there is money in America, but it is much better to live in Italy.'

'But this is dreadful, Nino. I suppose there is nothing to be done when the hailstorm has been, but what do you do?'

'Swear, signora,' and he laughed, 'swear when we see the fields, swear when we think of the storm, just swear. We can do nothing, and have a lazy time because there is no harvest to speak of. Do you see that tree there, and the marks on the bark? That was done in the storm of '81. I can just remember it, and the winter that followed. . . . It was a great storm, and the crops were entirely ruined. We knew of no America then and we nearly starved. The plants never properly recovered. You see, it is not only the harvest which is spoilt, the plants suffer so, often the damage is permanent.'

He picked up his water-bottle and swung his coat over his left shoulder.

'You are going to Campià?' I asked.

'It is dinner time.'

'But it is hardly eleven o'clock.'

'Dinner is at half-past eleven.'

'And how long have you been at work?'

'Since four o'clock, signora.'

He went up the path to the fontana, but stopped.

'Do you hear them calling'? he asked.

'Yes,' I answered, 'they cannot have found Bernardo yet.'

'No, they will hardly find him alive. Good-bye.'

Bernardo was an old man in very ill health. Last Sunday night at ten o'clock he had walked out of his home and had never returned. Ever since his relations had been searching for him, but not a trace could they find. This was the fourth day, and they were beginning to lose hope.

I watched Nino until he was out of sight. The mountain folk all walk slowly and have short, thick legs.

I had arranged with Nino that he should sit for me, as I wanted to draw him. He came in his midday rest, and sat from one until three or even four o'clock. He did this readily enough, and I do not doubt he would have done it for no remuneration whatever, for I had a difficulty in getting him to accept a twopenny packet of tobacco and a drink of beer for an afternoon's sitting. He preferred beer to wine, believing it to be more strengthening. A good model is valuable, and he was always punctual. Neither did he ever fail me, always letting me know if he was unable to come.

Nino was very talkative, and when Rosina was in the kitchen they would keep up a running conversation. I rather liked this, for when Nino sat silent he would get more gloomy and dejected every minute—thinking of his fine and the police-court. But

sometimes he would become a little too animated, gesticulating and laughing, so that it was impossible to draw him. I had already admonished him several times one afternoon, but Rosina would go on talking and he would *not* sit still. At last in a state of desperation I said :—

'Villano!' It was an epithet that Rosina frequently used for Riccardo.

There was a dead silence.

'Signora,' said Nino at last, taking his pipe from his lips, 'my shoulders are strong enough to bear even that.'

'It is a dreadful thing to say,' admonished Rosina, 'and I don't expect you know what it means, or you wouldn't say it.'

'But in English we say "you villain," and it isn't anything bad.'

She explained what it meant. A villano was a rude, boorish, clumsy fellow, without any manners whatever, a clown, in fact. It was a word I oughtn't to use. It would be better to call him *ignorante* or *insolente*.

'Oh, Rosina,' I sighed, 'I don't know what would happen if I called an English model insolent! What a language yours is. Only the other day, when I was walking up from the town, I overtook Nino and Teresina. They wanted to carry my bag, and kept chasing me about so as to take it, which is fatiguing on that road. I didn't want either of them to carry it, as they were loaded themselves. At last I got angry, and cried with great vehemence, '*Per la Madonna!*' The effect was marvellous. Teresina skipped about three yards backwards down the steep road and was completely cowed for the rest of the walk, Nino jumped a whole yard into the air with surprise, and they both looked as if I'd presented a pistol at their heads——'

'But, signora, it is an awful swear word.'

'How am I to know that? I've heard Nino say it hundreds of times, and it doesn't seem to me very different from saying '*Per Dio!*'

'Ah, *per Dio* every one may say—but *per la Madonna . . .!*'

'And *ostia* and *sacramento* are bad words too?'

'Signora, you must never say them.'

'But Nino can't say a sentence without slipping an "*ostia*" into it. How many times has he said it this afternoon? His language is dreadful.'

'When one uses a word often,' said Nino, 'it loses its meaning. I don't think of the Host when I say "*ostia.*" Besides, the priests say it is not blasphemous to use these words, unless we prefix an adjective. For instance, to say "*Porca Madonna*" is wicked.'

'I should think so! And what does "*orca cane*" mean?'

'It doesn't mean anything. It is a way of changing a wicked expression into something harmless. It stands for "*sporca carne,*" referring to the flesh of Christ. In just the same way you hear people say "*porca madosca*" and "*osteria*" or "*sacramesco.*" It all means nothing.'

Our further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of three very hot individuals. They were the village priest, Renzi Giuseppe the giant, and his nephew, Renzi Francesco. They called for wine and went into the parlour. We all followed them, for it was evident something had happened. They all shouted at once in the most excited fashion, and Giuseppe gesticulated so violently that I kept well out of range.

It took Rosina quite a long time before she could make head or

tail of them. She leant against the door-post, listening, but saying nothing. After about half an hour they grew a little calmer, and we began to understand.

Bernardo had been found—dead, yesterday afternoon, and they had just buried him. Giuseppe and Francesco, who were related to him, had been pall-bearers. The priest had read the service, and here they were at San Lorenzo to slake their thirst. It was intensely hot and the perspiration streamed down their faces.

Bernardo had been found, yes, at the bottom of the Ridge of Foxes, with a great wound in his head. A girl had passed there and seen him. A message had been at once sent to the police and the doctor, but although they had word in the town before five o'clock in the evening, they never came until this morning! The body had to be left out there all night, the police must see it before it is moved away. It was dreadful for the relations. The police come up soon enough if they think they are likely to summon any one—but for a poor dead man and bereaved family—not they! They think they can treat us anyhow, but we have feeling as well as other people. What's more, they are legally obliged to come at once. When we asked to-day why they had not come, we were told to mind our own business! And one of the police actually asked Francesco why he did not take off his hat to him! Francesco answered that he had saluted him once, and considered that sufficient! . . . And Bernardo? The doctor said *he had only been dead two days.* It was yesterday, Friday, that he was found—and he disappeared on Sunday. Think of it. We went up and searched the top of the ridge and there we found a little place where he must have sat hidden. It was right in some bushes, and we could see where he had sat and where he had



The Mourners.

leant back. His hat was there and his zoccoli. For three days he must have sat there, from Sunday night until Wednesday—without food or drink. . . . There is no water nearer than the village fountain. Such hot days too. . . . It was dreadful to think of. . . . And we passed there in our search, calling his name, and he must have heard us, it is certain that he did, but he did not answer. . . . Poor old man, hidden and alone in that familiar spot, preparing himself for the fatal leap. . . .

They went on discussing it, and presently some one produced a pack of cards. The breviary was put on the side-table, and Nino made a willing fourth. They played cards for four hours and drank a great deal of wine.

I am afraid the priest was too fond of the bottle. He was not a man I respected. On the few occasions that I had conversed with him, he disgusted me with his vulgarity. His words always had a double meaning, and his insinuations were unpriestly. Most of the villagers held him in contempt. No doubt he himself knew how badly he filled his position and what a sham it was. His very weakness drove him to seek consolation in wine and a woman whose husband was in America.

His ardent wish had been to become a soldier—but they made a priest of him. It was very much to be regretted!

CHAPTER V

CHARCOAL BURNERS

CASTELLI CRISTOFOLO was Bortolo's first cousin, and he very frequently came to San Lorenzo. Sometimes he was on his way to the town with an old white donkey and would come in for a glass of wine, but more often he only went down the garden, where he had a strip of land. He was a spirited, talkative old fellow. His gestures seemed almost too energetic for one so ancient. He was thin and bony, and his close-cropped hair and moustaches were snow white. Anetta, his wife, was a placid old lady, so gentle, I thought her.

They had four children. The eldest girl was married to Renzi Giuseppe, and had a very numerous family. The second, the beautiful Maria, married Di Marchesi Stefen. Dominica, the third daughter, had been many years from home. She went into service in a distant town, and for six years nothing was heard of her. Her relations thought her dead. However, one day a letter came. She was not only alive, but doing well, and had saved money. The six years had been spent in France and London, and she had also learned to speak a little Spanish and German. She was an interpreter in a Florentine Hotel. That summer she paid a visit to Campià, and finding her old home very tumbledown she had a new house erected on the site. Lately she had married a wealthy grocer in Florence, and was quite a grand lady. No doubt I would see her, for she was coming to Campià in July.

Bigi was the only son. I saw him often at the dances, but he never danced nor spoke to me. So I had to study him from a distance, for he interested me. He had a deliberate way of moving which was puzzling. It was as if he were half stunned or had suffered a shock and never recovered. Rosina spoke as if she were very fond of him, but I never saw Bigi at San Lorenzo.

One day she told me they had quarrelled. It was about her eldest daughter Selina, who had gone to Cannes last September. Some relations had offered her a good position in a shop there. Bigi had not liked Selina going—that was all.

'Selina is only eighteen and far too young to marry,' said Rosina, vigorously wiping a dish, 'so I thought it would be a good thing to send her abroad as I had the opportunity. Perhaps . . . when she comes back and still cares for Bigi . . . something may come of it.'

'And Bigi?' I asked.

'Ah—Bigi was very angry about it. But I only did as any mother would have done in my place . . .' said Rosina, on the defensive against her conscience. 'Do you know, they don't even write to each other? There's true love for you!' and she slammed the dish down on the table.

'Have they quarrelled?' I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

Selina wrote affectionate letters to her parents, which Rosina showed me with pride. Sometimes they contained money.

I imagined Selina to be a jolly girl, full of life and charm. There was a photo of her taken together with Bigi in the bedroom. They stood side by side, perfectly naturally, laughing. Bigi looked fatter

and very handsome. Selina was perfectly lovable. It was such a pleasing picture, that a later portrait sent from Cannes came rather as a shock. It was conventional, and Selina stood resting her gloved hand on a pedestal. She was serious and glum. The bloom of the mountains had already worn off, and I am afraid it will not be quite the same Selina who will return next year.

.

Cristofolo and Bigi were burning charcoal, and I was looking forward to see them at work, and to make a sketch. But just when everything was ready for the first stack to be lit, Bigi had an accident.

The wood was being stacked in two places, and it was at the farther place Bigi fell. A little path led to it across the face of a cliff. There was a dizzy drop below, and Cristofolo, who was showing me the way, turned and offered to hold my hand. I declined the hand but I felt afraid. The path was very narrow and went down hill, in places it had given way and been patched with faggots. Right down at the bottom I could see the road winding along the edge of the lower cliff, which rose straight out of the lake.

The path led to a little circular platform poised at a corner of the cliff. The stack stood in the centre with two feet of path all the way round it, and a wall of brushwood to keep the wind off, and a curtain of sacking across the farther opening. On three sides the mountain went sheer down, on the fourth it went straight up. The path went on for a few yards round the corner into a dry torrent bed.

Bigi, carrying billets down from higher up, had slipped and rolled down the torrent bed, apparently to destruction. Only one

thing stood between him and death, and that was a sapling, the only obstacle standing on the whole stretch.

Cristofolo, poor old man, saw his son fall, and clasping his hands in dismay, watched Bigi tumble and slide over the stones, and the stones tumble and bounce over him. The billets were scattered. Down went Bigi for fifty feet, when Fate bumped him against that little tree and he stopped. . . . The stones went on rolling down to the bottom.

Cristofolo peered down, muttering. He was certain Bigi was dead. But Bigi was only dazed, and presently gave a sign of life. His father was too old to climb down to him and too weak to think of helping him up, so he ran along the path in great agitation calling on Nino, whose lands were close by. Nino was hoeing. It did not take him long to bring the injured man to a place of safety.

In the afternoon I went to see Bigi. The house was on the mountain road, and I entered the walled-in courtyard by a massive green gate. A stairway outside the house led up into the kitchen, which was over the stable. Anetta was there and called to Bigi, who came at once and sat down on the big wooden chest. She put a hard pillow at his back.

He had a deep cut below his left eye which was bandaged up, his right arm was swollen and stiff, his back ached, and he was bruised all over. He was in great pain, but tried not to show it. I had not expected to find him such a Spartan.

The priest had bandaged him up, he told me, and the wound below his eye might have to be sewn.

'Then why have you not gone to the hospital?' I asked.

'The priest will sew it up,' he answered.

'But surely, Bigi, if it is so close to your eye, it would be best to go to a doctor,' I objected, 'the priest cannot be as skilful as a doctor—and an eye is important.'

'What you say is quite true,' he admitted.

'Then why not go at once? You could ride down on the donkey. A thing like that ought to be seen to at once.'

'The priest would not like it,' Bigi said, hesitating. 'I will see what he says to-night when he comes in. Perhaps I might go to the doctor to-morrow, but I could not go without asking him first.'

'Bless me, Bigi,' I said, 'I do believe you are afraid of the priest!'

Bigi was one of those who dared openly denounce him.

'Oh, the priest,' he answered, 'I think precious little of him as a man and as a priest—but as a doctor he is valuable. But what a tyrant! If I sent for a doctor without first asking his advice, he would not come near me, nor doctor me next time I was ill or had an accident. One must choose between him and the doctor. If a case is very bad he sends us to the hospital, but if he can patch it up he does so himself.'

'But you know he makes mistakes sometimes,' I ventured, remembering some of Rosina's stories.

'There is no doubt he takes too much responsibility,' answered Bigi, painfully changing his position, 'and we would much rather have a doctor. But where is the doctor? Down in the town. Do you think he will come up this long stony road if he can help it—for a peasant? He says he cannot find the time—or some other excuse; or he promises to come and doesn't arrive until next day or the day after. It is a proverb in the village that a man has time to die three times before the doctor comes. So you see there is no

choice. It is better to call in the priest than wait for the doctor. If we are well enough to go to the hospital it is all right, for we are well looked after there.' He paused and moved again, checking his desire to swear at the pain. 'We've given up trying to get the doctor to come,' he went on wearily, 'you know he is obliged to come if sent for—but that doesn't seem to worry him. They think we are such a set of dullards in the village that they can treat us anyhow.'

I had heard that last phrase many times, and found that it covered a great deal of injustice. As one was poor, these things had to be put up with, but they were never forgotten.

No doubt the priest was very efficient, and I did not want to undermine his reputation. But I was very much astonished to find he had such power over the villagers. If he had been good or benevolent or pious or even liked, I should have understood it better, but he was nothing of the sort. There were very few who did not speak ill of him behind his back or admonish him publicly. As for generosity, there was not a villager to whom he did not owe money —for wine ordered and consumed, but not paid for.

As he spent so little of his time in prayer and meditation he was able to occupy the greater part of the day farming some land which he had bought above the village. At sundown I often watched him cross the piazza on his way home, sometimes carrying a load of wood. He cut rather an odd figure. He wore his clerical knee-breeches and long black stockings and a white shirt. Round his neck was a gaudy coloured scarf tied in a loose, untidy knot. On his head was a remarkable old straw hat with a wide brim. The more pious villagers ground their teeth with rage at the sight of such a spectacle, whilst the more humorous exchanged glances.

One day the priest took it into his head to drive a pig to market in the town. He did not trouble to put on his coat, but went as he was, in the gay scarf and the straw hat. The local papers put in a paragraph and ridiculed him.

How that hurt the village pride!

No wonder folks thought they were all fools in the village—who else could tolerate such a priest?

Plots were again hatched to get rid of him. The elders sent a petition to the bishop and even had an audience with that great personage. They urged that the village children were under a bad influence, that they were growing up depraved and impious, and that even the little ones swore, and had no respect for the church or for the priest, who set such a bad example. The bishop gave assurances, but nothing was done beyond another reprimand for the priest. The bishop did not want to remove him for the simple reason that he did not know where else to send him. He did not wish such depravity to be introduced into another community; Campià was already spoilt by his bad example—it had had twenty-two years of it—so it did not matter so much if he stayed there or not—besides, no one influential lived there.

So the priest remained, and the villagers grew more and more dissatisfied, except, perhaps, a few. These were mostly women who were accustomed to consider a priest too holy to be criticised.

.

Three days later Cristofolo was at San Lorenzo, rather disconsolate. The charcoal burning could no longer be put off, and he would have to do it alone. Bigi was still on the sick list and his two sons-in-law were busy elsewhere. To-morrow, perhaps, they

might help him, but to-day and to-night he would be alone. He didn't like being alone at night.

Rosina was sympathetic and then she had a brilliant idea.

'Signora Antonia,' she called, 'signora, here is a chance for you. You always say you want to paint the sunrise. Why not sit up with Cristofolo by the charcoal? You can take that sack of yours and rest in it if you are tired. Cristofolo won't mind—will you?'

Cristofolo was very willing, rather incredulous but thoroughly amused. Rosina tried to convince him that I would come, and made all the necessary arrangements with her usual aptitude. Cristofolo wandered off to kindle the stack.

It was quite a long way off, over the Ridge of Houses, and then down to a place on the face of the cliff far below the village. Two gorges lay between it and San Lorenzo.

It was sundown when I arrived, and put down my sleeping sack by the hut Cristofolo had built himself.

Bigi was there. He had come down partly on a donkey and partly on his feet. His father was not a very experienced charcoal burner, and he wanted to see that the work was begun properly.

Bigi ought not to have come, his back was so painful he could hardly walk. His head was still bandaged and his arm in a sling, but he stood there as straight as a pole, as restrained and serious as usual.

He was just about to start for the village, but waited to have a talk with me, whilst Cristofolo went off to get some wood from the farther place.

We were in a little open space surrounded by bushes and trees, cut into two by a lower and upper terrace. The ridge was hidden,

but the crags above stood clear against the evening sky. Below, the ground fell away steeply. It was getting dusk.

Bigi sat down on a stone at the edge of the lower terrace. Behind him a pole propped up the branches of a fig-tree.

Every now and then the smoke from the stack blew across.

'You are better?' I asked.

'Yes, I get slowly better,' he answered.

We began to talk of Rosina.

'Signora,' said Bigi, smiling and looking at me with his unbandaged blue eye, 'I always want to dance with you, but I cannot ask you to if you sit close to Rosina. I wanted to mention it, as I do not wish you to think I had been rude . . . but you know, I have a quarrel with Rosina, and do not like to go near her.'

'As soon as you are well enough, we must have a dance,' I answered, 'in spite of Rosina.'

'You see, I shall never forgive Rosina,' he went on, 'and I told her so at the time. I told her I would never speak to her again if she sent Selina away.'

'You cared very much for Selina?' I asked.

'Signora, for six years we had been friends, Selina and I, ever since she was a little girl. I was nearly always at San Lorenzo and I was always welcome. It was taken for granted that we should marry.'

'Then why did Selina go away?'

'It was like this,' said Bigi, nursing his swollen wrist, 'Rosina's relations from Cannes came to stay with her. It was a woman who was Rosina's cousin, with her son. They are wealthy people and the son took a fancy to Selina.'

He paused.

'Now you know Rosina well enough by now to know that she is fond of money. It just pleased her to think Selina should marry a rich man, and her cousin spoke a great deal of the thousands of lire her son would inherit. So the two women plotted together and arranged that Selina should go to Cannes—so as to get her away from me, I suppose—that would make it more likely that Selina should favour the young man.'

'And what did Selina wish to do?'

'She went to Cannes . . . but she has refused the young man. Signora—if you had seen the cousin, a coarse woman with a bad reputation. I do not understand how Rosina could send her daughter away with her. . . . I went to Rosina and told her what I thought of the whole business and she said the most insulting things to me—words I can never forgive. I told her that if she sent Selina away, I would never speak to her again . . . and I have not been to San Lorenzo since.'

'Rosina speaks first and thinks afterwards,' I said, 'but I see you have great cause to be angry with her. But you know, I believe she is very fond of you—when I told her of your accident, her eyes filled with tears.'

Bigi laughed.

'No doubt,' he answered, 'now that her other plan has failed, she has a place in her heart for me again. But I have no quarrel with Bortolo. At the time he came to me and told me how sorry he was, and that it was not of his doing.'

'Rosina told me,' I remarked, 'that Selina was sent away because she was too young to be married. She is only eighteen.'

'Signora, I am twenty-eight.'

We sat silent for a while. I understood now. Selina had not liked the rich young man, but the world was tempting and Cannes was the chance of a lifetime. She would earn good wages there. But Bigi would never forgive her for going. Did she love him, I wondered. Perhaps she was not sure of it herself. Probably Rosina had insisted on the journey, and Rosina with a broomstick in her hand had the best of the argument, and poor little Selina had no choice. She cried bitterly when she left. Bigi's sorrow was tearless.

I looked up at the crags and sighed. What a pity it was. Here was Bigi's life quite spoilt, and he was such a nice fellow. It was too bad of Rosina. She admitted he would make an excellent husband, and if he was not rich he was well connected. Hadn't his sister married a wealthy grocer? I think Rosina had moments when she repented.

'The quarrel is only between me and Rosina,' he went on, 'my people all go to San Lorenzo and the boys often . . .' he stopped suddenly.

I turned to look at him. He was gone.

There was a crash.

He had fallen backwards on to the slope below and was slipping down it. I sprang to my feet, but in the dim light I could not distinguish him. Down he crashed over the undergrowth and through the bushes—was he never going to stop? He had not uttered a cry nor made a sound . . . perhaps he was terribly injured . . . or dead . . . perhaps his neck was broken. I stood waiting in fear.

At last he came to a stop by some large bushes and there was a long silence. I stooped to scramble down to him when the bushes

below rustled. Silently he scrambled to his feet, and standing still for a moment he burst out laughing!

'Bigi,' I said, 'aren't you hurt?'

'No, no,' he answered, still laughing, 'I don't think so.' He pushed his way slowly up the slope and clambered on to the terrace. He stood up and looked at me, and we both burst out laughing.

'It was the pole,' he explained, a little ashamed at the indignity of it, 'I leant against it and it gave way. I'm not hurt at all. I just slid down on my back, head first, and protected myself with my sound arm. . . . Do you know,' he said, stretching, 'I think it has done my back good! It feels easier.'

We had another laugh, then he picked up his coat and limped slowly home.

Cristofolo came with an armful of wood. We collected leaves and grass, which he needed for mending possible vent holes in the stack, and we clambered on the slopes, talking. I often found it difficult to follow what he said, because he talked the dialect so indistinctly, having lost all his teeth.

I expected he would sit up by the stack until fairly late, but was mistaken. He said it was bedtime, and taking me to the hut, told me that I was to sleep there. But I shook my head and repeated what Rosina had already told him about my sleeping sack. He shrugged his shoulders.

It was a nice little hut built against the side of the upper terrace. The stone walls were five feet high and a rough gabled roof covered it. Inside, stretching from side to side, was a bunk, filled with dried maize plants—scartorz he called it—and a few sacks for covering.

In a corner by the doorway a little fire smouldered, the smoke finding its way out anywhere. There was no door.

He then took me a little way up the path where an overhanging rock made a kind of shelter. On the stony ground he had spread some sacks, and near by, on a natural shelf, was his alarm clock, a lantern, and a water bottle. This was where he was going to sleep, he told me, the baita, as he called the hut, was for me.

I thanked him for his kindness but told him that having brought my sack and in no way wishing to upset his arrangements, I preferred to sleep in it. From the hut I would be unable to see the sunrise.

Cristofolo didn't believe in my sleeping sack.

He walked back and tended the stack, patting it with a long handled spade. When daylight was quite gone he lit the lantern, and wishing me good-night, retired to his rock shelter.

I unrolled my sleeping sack on the upper terrace, choosing a spot under some trees which the smoke seemed to avoid. Creeping in I sat and listened to the night sounds.

The full moon had risen above Monte Moro beyond the lake.

After a long while Cristofolo came to give the stack another pat, but his real object was to see what I had been up to. He found the baita empty and the signora in her sleeping sack on the bare ground. He thought I was asleep. Muttering inaudibly he decided to take possession of the baita and went back to the rock shelter to fetch his things. I was very pleased to hear him do this, as I hated to think of the old man sleeping in that hard place. He muttered and coughed for a long time afterwards, but finally he went to sleep, and I felt very much alone.

We were too far away to hear the sounds of people and houses,

nor did I hear a dog bark. But crickets were calling all about me and mice rustled over the leaves. In the shadows myriads of fireflies danced and darted and the moon saturated everything with peaceful light. This was indeed fairyland.

Sometimes the stack would give a mysterious crackle and the smoke blew about and scented the air, but the breeze scarcely moved the leaves against the sky.

I lay down and looked at the stars through the foliage above. A sweet sound came from the top of the tree and thrilled me. Two nightingales were there, and sang the whole night through, another sang on the tree by the baita. I heard them in my sleep, and when I awoke, and I hear then when I think of them now.

At two o'clock I woke up. The moon had travelled far across the sky but still shone in patches on the terraces. The air was a little fresher, it was a perfectly serene night. The nightingales were still singing. I felt very happy and very safe.

I crept out of the sack to have a look at the charcoal stack. Two large vents were glowing in it, so I went to the baita where Cristofolo was fast asleep.

'Cristofolo,' I called, 'Cristofolo—Cristofolo! The stack needs tending.'

'Campanile!' he ejaculated, and sprang up with his usual energy.

'Truly,' he said, when he got to the stack, 'there are two holes. Per Dio, signora, is that why you called me?'

'Yes,' I answered, afraid that I had done the wrong thing. 'I thought it ought to be seen to.'

'So it does,' he answered, chuckling, 'it was very necessary. I overslept. Well—I never . . .'

It was evident that he was profoundly astonished. And why? Because the signora had condescended to wake up a poor man whose charcoal was spoiling. The few 'ladies' he had come in contact with would never have lowered themselves to do such a thing—they would not have cared. They would have kept him in his place—he was only a peasant and probably a fool. But this English signora—campanile!—he would have something to tell them in the village to-morrow. . . .

I am afraid these cogitations kept Cristofolo awake for the rest of the night. He was very much upset. He muttered and coughed in his baita long after I fell asleep.

I awoke before sunrise. A grandson had already brought Cristofolo's breakfast, and there were sounds of hoeing.

I sat by the baita and ate the food I had brought while Cristofolo sat and talked to me. He had slept badly, he said, the nightingales had kept him awake.

Presently Di Marchesi Stefen came to relieve his father-in-law. He was an expert charcoal-burner. He rarely spoke, but watched and worked, which is the routine. He never hurried nor hesitated, but each movement was graceful, deft, and sufficient. It was fascinating and restful to watch him. He, too, found it interesting to watch me—so we dodged each other's glances until it was time for me to go back to San Lorenzo.

CHAPTER VI

THE POLICE COURT

ROSINA and I had decided to go down to the town on the day Nino was to appear in court. I had also another reason for going. It was to see whether the shops were as devoid of fruit and vegetables as Riccardo made out. I had become a little suspicious, and began to think he said there was nothing because he did not want the bother of carrying things up. And it was as I suspected, both shops were well stocked.

The court opened at nine and we arrived in very good time. Nino was earlier still. In fear of being late he had started off absurdly early and passed by San Lorenzo whilst we were still at breakfast. He was extraordinary cheerful. After weeks of gloomy dejection it was good to see. At last the suspense would be over and he would know the worst. At any rate he was ready for a tussle with the authorities; in fact, he would rather enjoy it. The lawyer had promised to defend the case (for 10 lire paid in advance) and there was every reason to hope that the fine would not be so large. Besides, how unjust to summons the poor fellow for having his door open! How could it be shut if some one had just come in? The lamp really *had* been out, whatever the police had said to the contrary, and eleven o'clock was long past closing time. Hadn't the place been empty of guests? It was absurd altogether. How could a door

always be locked if there was only one door; a body had to go in and out ? The police were ready to take out a summons for anything. Madre mia, what a world it was !

Thus argued Rosina as we walked down the road between terraces of vines and olives and around nasty precipitous corners. She had long ago forgotten the real facts of the case, the jolly dance and the scuffle up the back path. She was most indignant at the way Nino was being treated.

The mountain side was lovely in the morning sun. The plants refreshed after the heavy showers. Rosina prophesied a record year. Indeed it looked like it. The fruit seemed more mature lower down, and some of the villas near the town had strange southern plants in the gardens, but we saw little of them, for the road was walled in. We passed Riccardo, who was on his way home, and presently came upon Filip with his oxen wagon. He was standing in the road listening.

Had we, he asked, noticed if any carts were coming down? We were quite sure we had not—we had heard nothing. In these parts you hear the carts a long way off, the locked wheels screech over the stones. He took our word and concluded it was safe to continue. The road was far too narrow for two wagons to pass each other. So he prodded the near ox with his goad, and the wagon rumbled on.

Rosina crossed herself and said a short prayer at both the little wayside chapels, but she took no notice of the big church we passed on the outskirts of the town. We went through several narrow streets to an inn kept by Nino's mother-in-law. Here Rosina changed her shoes, putting on a beautiful pair of new boots which she had

brought with her in the basket. They were too good to wear on the mountain road and a great deal too tight. She was very elegant, a light blouse and a fawn skirt, tightly laced and very hot. A black lace scarf was on her head, and she carried a little fan. There was something very pleasing about Rosina.

She took me to the house of the Signor godfather, as she called him, but he was out. It was he who sent the newspaper to Bortolo every day when he had read it. Pina was his godchild. He was a lonely bachelor, Rosina said, living with a niece and her husband who neglected him. It was she, Rosina, who looked after his clothes and made his shirts. She often spoke of the Signor godfather and of the interest he took in Pina. I never heard a word of any of the other children's godparents. She was a little proud of this Signor godfather, perhaps because he was above her station in life.

Quite lately he had spent a week at San Lorenzo, a pompous, thick little man. My conversations with him never got beyond polite and unnecessary phrases. He had spent most of his time sitting just outside the door, in cogitation, but he put in a good deal of time with Pina, trying to improve her mind. They got on fairly well together, but I think he found Pina a little disappointing. She was only six years old, a little too young to profit by pompous discourse.

The Signor godfather not being at home, Rosina left the shirts with a neighbour. We walked round the shady courtyard and looked at the roses. I wondered at the dilapidation of the walls. One gets the impression that nothing is repaired until it falls. But I do not think that is altogether true, the insides of the houses I always found spick and span, and much brighter than the exterior had led me to expect. The roses climbed high up the two houses in wild

confusion, and long stems curved down and brushed us. Pigeons fluttered on the wall, bright spots against the blue sky, which seemed very high overhead.

Rosina pointed to two windows on the first floor of the one house which, she said, was the police court. As it was nine o'clock we walked up the stairs. Halfway we halted, other people were waiting too. The magistrate had not yet come.

We saw Nino for a few minutes and his two witnesses, Renzi Faustino and Silvestri Girolomo, all in their Sunday best. They had come to prove that Nino's lamp had been out when the police had come. Girolomo was a dark, hairy, lean man, his gestures reminding me of a goat. Faustino was fair and inclined to be stout, a jolly looking rogue. I never saw him at San Lorenzo, because he had quarrelled with Rosina about a pig.

The magistrate kept us waiting three-quarters of an hour, but when he did come he set to work without any preliminaries whatever. It was a much less formal affair than I had anticipated and was conducted with good humour.

The room was just an ordinary room with light washed walls. At the farther end sat the magistrate at a long table. At his right sat the chief of police, on his left the clerk. None of them wore a uniform. Close to the table were two doors, one on either side. Just behind the officials were the high windows we had seen from the courtyard.

At the opposite end of the room was the little door by which we had entered, and in front, about four feet from the wall, was a wooden barrier with an open gate. This space was for the public as well as for those directly connected with the cases. No seats of

any description were provided. Just on the other side of the barrier were a couple of chairs and here sat the round little lawyer.

On the wall was a large notice saying that all were equal before the law.

The magistrate picked the top blue paper off the pile before him and read out the first case, the name of the accused, the accuser, and the witnesses. They stepped out from behind the barrier with bared heads.

The witnesses, of which there were usually two, were taken through the door on the left. They were not allowed to hear the preliminary evidence. In most cases the plaintiff was a policeman and usually the same one—a very efficient but unpleasant-looking constable.

He came in from the door the witnesses were taken through, and gave evidence very smartly in a military, stiff attitude which contrasted unfavourably with the peasants easy, graceful movements.

There was quite a party behind the barrier, a collection of culprits, witnesses, and sympathetic friends. As an audience they were wonderfully responsive, following everything with interest, amused at the humour, horrified at the fines. There was a good deal of whispering amongst them even to strangers. They all felt equal, not so much before the law as before the magistrate and his assistants. They were symbols of the *signori*, the ruling class. And if it wasn't the magistrate who made the taxes and oppressed the people, he was a part of the same machinery. I did not understand the conditions sufficiently to judge whether the magistrate was a just man or no, but I am very certain the peasants did what they could to hoodwink him, and he had to contend with a good deal of shameless lying.

The first case was a man accused of carrying a long-bladed knife in the street. It was late at night, and he had been in altercation with two other men. It was a grave offence. The law forbids you to carry a pointed knife with a blade longer than an inch. Such knives must be kept indoors. This law was made to put a stop to the stabbing so frequent in Southern Italy, but these people of the north don't readily use a knife in that way.

The next culprit had sung loudly in the streets at night. He pleaded guilty, but defended himself with such wit that the magistrate himself laughed heartily and the unpleasant-looking policeman smiled. He was dismissed with a caution.

Then two miserable wretches were brought from the witness room, where they had been in custody. You would know them for cadgers anywhere, small, underfed, badly shaped creatures. They had stolen faggots. The plaintiff was a burly, well-fed farmer, and had caught them red-handed. They were sent to prison for three days.

The next defendant kept a café. The police raided it after closing time and found it not only open but full of people.

Defendant explained that he was only having a party, his friends and relations were there. They were his uncles and cousins. You may stand your friends drinks after closing time if you lock the door and take no money in payment. The magistrate, however, was not inclined to believe that this man was so generous to his 'uncles and cousins,' and fined him two lire and costs. When a café or inn proprietor is convicted for the third time he loses his licence.

The magistrate would do a good deal of arguing for each case in a conversational sort of way, together with the chief of police and

the clerk. And sometimes the round little lawyer would join in and glance back over the barrier for our applause.

This time a woman came forward. I knew her well by sight. She had come to San Lorenzo with her daughter and ordered some wine. Rosina served them in a constrained way so that I asked about them when they were gone. The woman was from the town and had a bad reputation. I had doubtless noticed the sign of 'The Sun,' she kept that café. Among the vulgar it was called the café of the Palpitating Heart. She, Rosina, did not like to mix with such people—no.

Meanwhile the proprietress of the Palpitating Heart stood before the table, fashionably dressed in a real shantung blouse. She carried a beautiful leather purse and wore all her jewels and was ever so striking and handsome. She threw herself dramatically on the pity of the magistrate. The door had been wide open, after closing time, yes, it was true, but the public room had been dark and empty. The light the police had seen through the door was from upstairs, from her daughter's bedroom. She herself had been out, had just run across the road to give a message to her aunt—she hadn't been gone a minute—and forgot to shut the door—it was an oversight.

She defended herself energetically, sometimes indignant, sometimes pathetic. We all felt her a wronged woman, an unfortunate widow, when she was fined two lire and costs. There had been a previous conviction.

The next to come forward was a well-dressed lad of about eighteen. He had carried a gun without a licence, and had been shooting birds in close time. There was no excuse for him whatever, said the magistrate, his parents were well-to-do, and could easily

afford a licence, a matter of about fifteen lire; moreover, he had previously been fined for the same offence. This bright youth had nothing whatever to say for himself and the magistrate gave him a jolly good talking to. In the end he was fined the maximum penalty, 105 lire and costs. We looked a little fearfully at a youth who could afford to incur such a fine.

Then came a man who had sold diseased orange plants, and after him came a lanky wretch who had committed several small thefts, and was in custody. He had ordered dinner in a café and slunk off without paying, taking a bottle of wine with him.

The lawyer defended him and made a spirited speech, bouncing up to the very table just to thump it. The defendant had formerly been a policeman and had a good character. For the moment he was out of work and had no money—and there was the temptation. . . . But it is wrong to steal so he was sent to prison.

I noticed that the persons found guilty were either fined or else sent to prison. It was never optional.

The very last case was Nino's.

He stood before the table holding his hat, outwardly calm, inwardly boiling. Three times he attempted to interrupt the policeman's evidence, and three times the round little lawyer called him to order. Wasn't he to make a speech afterwards to put all that right?

Girolomo was the first witness. He was standing in the street, he said, when the police appeared. What was he doing there? What does one do on a Sunday, signor? One stands about, (but not at eleven o'clock Girolomo !). He was doing nothing. He saw the police come, and wondering what they could want at such an

hour, he followed them to Nino's house and saw them open the door. The lamp had been out.

Faustino told the same tale. The police, however, insisted that the lamp had been burning.

The magistrate was a little perplexed and turned to the chief of police with a question.

'For my part,' the chief of police answered, 'I always believe what my men say.'

Then up jumped the lawyer like a rocket and held a lengthy oration. He tried to prove that the lamp was out, and being out that the inn was closed, and went through all the arguments which Rosina had already thrashed out. There is no doubt that his words had weight, for the magistrate was lenient, and Nino was only fined four lire and costs.

He was pleased. Of course it was a lot of money, but nothing to what he had feared. It had certainly been worth while to engage the lawyer, even if it cost ten lire and the witnesses cost about as much. He had to pay them each a day's wages and treat them to dinner. The costs would amount to about fifteen lire. He was off now with the witnesses to dinner at his mother-in-law's.

'Good-bye,' he called to us, 'you will come to-night to say farewell to Gaetano and the others? There is to be dancing.'

.

After supper Rosina and I walked up to the village to say good-bye to Gaetano, the Cominellis, Conrado and Agostino. They were to leave on the morrow for America via Paris and Havre, to exchange the sunny out-door life for working under a foreman in a coal mine.

We went to Cominelli's house fully expecting that the dance

would be there. Mrs Cominelli had a passion for dancing and ever since the police raid at Nino's we had danced at her house.

Cominelli seemed just a little out of place in the village. He was from Southern Italy, very different from the mountain men. The other inhabitants were so homogenous, probably because the families had married and intermarried for generations to such an extent that they were like one large family.

Cominelli was short, fat, and puffy, and ogled with big brown eyes. He was handsome in an effeminate way, but he was not a bad fellow, and I modified my opinion of him when I heard he had given his wife a thrashing on one occasion ! She was fast, and carried on a little too freely with other men. Not with men in the village, but with soldiers or others she picked up in the town. Most of the mothers in the village were secretly pleased that she was off to America ; if it was any one who taught the young girls tricks it was Mrs Cominelli. Her husband had formerly been a custom-house soldier, and there were beautiful photos of him in uniform in their bedroom. On his marriage he set up as a photographer in the village, but it could not have been a remunerative profession in a place of two hundred souls, added to which his efforts were *not* remarkably good. What other work he did I do not know, except that his wife owned a tiny scrap of land which he farmed, and she had inherited some money on which they had lived. But it was nearly gone now, hence the journey to America. It was said that they were extravagant. When they left Rosina tidied up the house, which was left in her care, and we found an odd collection of things in the cupboard. We found a tin of *Plasmon*. Rosina looked at it suspiciously and then gave it to Lucia for her children. Lucia probably threw it in the

fire. Plasmon, who had ever heard of Plasmon? No doubt one of these mixtures the upper classes indulge in. Bah! she wasn't going to set up for being a lady!

The bedroom upstairs was wall-papered. It came as a real shock to me after the pleasant colour-washed walls in the other houses. Great big red flowers on a yellow ground. Rosina had all along been secretly hoping that I would take the Cominelli's house when they were gone—but I quite dashed her hopes on that score! I stood in the middle of the bedroom, and told her what I thought of that wall-paper, and how impossible it would be to live with it. She pointed in answer to the windows, to the most glorious view. To look back into the room was like cutting into another world.

My strongest reason for not taking that house was the smell from the courtyard next door. It was the house of Bertoldi, Toni, and Lucia. They were the most charming people, but the courtyard was horrible.

The Cominellis were busy tidying up. Lucia was helping in a neighbourly way and her daughter Ghita was rocking the baby in the dimly-lighted kitchen. The luggage had been sent on in advance, so there was no packing to be done.

The farther room was quite dark, and there was no sign of any dance.

'No, no, signora,' said Mrs Cominelli, 'we are not dancing here to-night, but at Nino's.'

I was thunderstruck.

'But this is absurd,' I said, 'isn't it enough that he has been summoned, and hasn't he this very day been convicted at the police court?'

'It will be quite safe, signora,' said Rosina, 'no one will ever imagine that we dance on a week-day. As for the police, they are hardly likely to toil up here on a Tuesday just to see what we are at. Nino said they might dance there. Come, let us go.'

It was very sporting of Nino.

The inn was empty except for Teresina. Nino had not yet returned, he was still in the town with the two witnesses. She expected him every minute. Of course we were going to dance, every one would come as soon as they had had supper.

As she spoke, the door opened, and the musicians came in looking tired after the day's work, followed by Gaetano, Raimondo, and several others. Conrado, with a pocket handkerchief tucked into his collar and his hat on the back of his head, looked the picture of dissipation. He had been drowning his sorrows in wine, knowing full well that he would not taste a good red wine again for many a day. He intended staying two years in America, but if the work were not regular he might have to stay longer. His father had left the lands to be equally divided between his four children, and Conrado wanted to buy his two sisters' share. The younger was very gifted and was studying to become a school-teacher. She passed her examinations brilliantly but needed money for her further education. It was a three years' course. Conrado, knowing how uncertain the harvest was, determined to go to America and save his wages so as to be able to pay his sisters. He would work very hard and contrive even to save a little sum for himself. Then he would come back to Campià, dear Campià, and marry Catina, the daughter of Giacomina. She was the prettiest girl in the village, and full of the fun and high spirits which was so marked in all the Bertoldis.

The players tuned up, and I watched Giacom with amusement. Guitars and mandolines are made with frets, and it was clearly an oversight that bass cellos are not. With a piece of white chalk specially kept in his waistcoat pocket Giacom soon put that to rights.

They were a happy party, dancing made them forget the parting on the morrow. Only the Cominellis looked sad, watching us with bright, tearful eyes, and Catina sat quietly beside Conrado, who was too drunk to dance. Raimondo and Gaetano stalked about between the dances talking loudly to each other in English, neither understanding what the other said. The listeners, however, were vastly impressed.

'Drink,' cried Gaetano, filling the players' glasses, and gesticulating with the bottle, 'drink—like 'ell—I not care one damn.'

'Jesus Christ,' answered Raimondo, 'sure. I come America soon enough—you bet—I come pretty damn soon—*ostia!*'

They had both taken their coats off. On the upper part of their arms they wore garters, a fashion affected by all who had been in America. Their shirt sleeves were pulled up and kept in place by them. I suppose the object was to keep the shirt cuff clean at the wrist or else to keep it out of sight when cuffs were worn. In very much the same way a navvy puts a strap round his leg below the knee, and pulls his trouser-leg up.

Gaetano was an elegant little fellow, neat and tidy. He was like Nino in that, only Nino had long ago given up the attempt, he was far too poor for fine clothes and his week-day suit was patched in more than twenty places. But it didn't matter how shabby he was, even his rags had a characteristic style and elegance about them. When he came back from America, they say, he arrived in a dark

blue suit and the most wonderful yellow boots Campiâ had ever seen. Raimondo did not particularly distinguish himself for elegance, but he had provided himself with a large stock of loud striped socks.

Gaetano was bubbling over with mirth and kept us laughing. Sometimes he would say the most unblushing things, but he knew how to say them, and so escaped being vulgar.

I asked him to sing. He was only too ready and took up his stand facing the musicians with his back to us. And he sang, oh, how he sang! He lifted up his voice and shouted, and we all yelled the chorus as happy as school-treat children in a train. He sang 'Tripoli,' of course, and who had more right to do so than he? Hadn't he been there himself fighting the Turks and come away without even a scratch? Vittoria and Costante, two inseparable friends, had fine voices. Costante sang seconds, and except for the shouting the singing was delightful. It was spontaneous, and showed musical feeling. Out-of-doors, of course, it would have sounded much better.

At midnight the door opened and in came Nino looking like a naughty schoolboy. He knew quite well that he ought to have been back hours ago, in fact, he had meant to. But the time had passed quickly with Girolomo and Faustino. He thought it was six o'clock, when his mother-in-law announced that it was closing time!

The men at once crowded round him, eager to hear of the police court affair. He gave it them in detail with a good deal of gesticulation. He had had enough wine to make it picturesque and in his own eyes he was a great hero.

.

I was asleep next morning at five when the saddened travellers

passed by San Lorenzo for the last farewell, but I was in the kitchen when Nino and his two sisters came back. They had been part of the journey with Gaetano.

Poor things, they were weary. None of them had slept, but sat up after the dance talking with Gaetano until it was time to go. Giacomino and Nino were quite haggard, and Nino's blind eye had lost its lustre.

Nino ordered beer. Wine was not enough for their jaded souls. Julietta, who was brighter than the others, because she sorrowed less, told us all about it.

'Yes, oh, misery, they have gone,' she said, 'and we all cried broken-heartedly—every one—even up at the village—but Cominelli——'

'Beautiful Virgin,' murmured Giacomina, 'Cominelli——'

'——he cried,' went on Julietta, 'and he cried—and he cried *so*, we all stopped crying to look at him. I never saw anything like it in my life.'

'Sacramento!' broke in Nino fiercely, 'he bawled like a baby.'

'He couldn't stop,' said Julietta, 'and he couldn't speak, but covered his face with his hands and cried and cried and cried——'

'And he isn't even a native of our village,' said Giacomina, 'he hasn't been there two years—I don't understand what he had to cry about *like that* for. I can understand that his wife was unhappy—but she only cried moderately. But you should have seen Cominelli . . . he went " bu—u, bu—u——" '

'Would you believe it?' said Nino, 'you know he sent his baggage in advance. When we got there he went to fetch it from the goods station, and they wouldn't give it him.'

'What! Wouldn't give it him?' asked Rosina.

'No, he'd left the receipt somewhere at Campià, forgotten to put it in his pocket. There's a *man* for you,' he added contemptuously. 'He ought to think of things like that instead of crying so loudly, orca cane. Any one can see he is not from these parts.'

'And the baggage?' asked Rosina.

'Oh, the blessed baggage,' said Nino wearily, 'Cominelli asked me to ask you to get it sent back here, then the next time any one is going to America from Campià or from the other villages, they might be asked to take it over for a slight consideration. I don't know what he wants to take it for at all. I never took any baggage when I went.'

Nino was cross. We sat silent for a little while whilst they drank the beer and Nino refilled the glasses.

'And Agostino,' suddenly began Julietta, 'he giggled all the way.'

'Didn't he?' called out Paolino, who had been silent in a corner, 'didn't he giggle, he said nothing but "ah—ah, ah—ah, ah—ah" all the time! I said to him "Good-bye, Agostino, I hope you will have a good journey and that God will keep you till we meet again" —and all he did was to clasp my hand and say, "Ah—ah, ah—ah, ah—ah." I hardly knew what to make of it.'

'Yes,' said Julietta, 'he kept it up all the time, he opened his blue eyes wide and giggled like this——'

Whereupon we all began to imitate Agostino's giggle. Paolino, however, excelled us all, and made us laugh in spite of ourselves.

They did not stay long. Nino wanted to be off to get to bed, and

they wandered up the familiar road, thinking of Gaetano, quite numb with sorrow and fatigue.

The following days Riccardo made our lives intolerable by constantly imitating Agostino's giggle, and only by the practical application of the broomstick could Rosina induce him to desist.

.

We had been speaking of the travellers and reckoned that they must be in Paris by now when the unexpected happened.

Agostino walked in at the door!

For a moment Rosina thought he was a ghost. Then he giggled stupidly and we all burst out laughing.

The steamship agency had advised him to return, he told us. A journey to America is never undertaken until the agents are satisfied with the would-be traveller's papers and passport. The regulations for third-class passengers are very strict. Persons under seventeen are not allowed to enter the States unless accompanied by a relative. Agostino was an orphan, but he was allowed to travel in the care of a friend on condition that a relation, or a person authorised by the relation, went to New York to meet him. If no one came to meet him he would, in all probability, *not* be allowed to land, and, what was worse, the people in whose care he was would not be allowed to land either! It is true Agostino had written to his grandmother that he was coming and that she must send to meet him, but he had received no answer that she would do so. The agent advised him most strongly not to go unless he had a letter in his possession stating she would. It seemed a little hard on this orphan boy going out to his nearest relative. Of course he

was not an emigrant. He would be back in a few years to serve in the army like the other boys who went to America.

There had lately been a lot of new regulations. For instance, a man with a blind eye was not allowed to land. This was very galling to Nino, to whom America was a last hope. He was a healthy, able-bodied man, and just because of that little accident to his eye, 'his defect,' as he called it, he would not be allowed to land in the States. He would be one of those undesirable aliens.

CHAPTER VII

RAIMONDO

I MADE friends with Raimondo over the fossil. It had been used to mend a mountain road and I wanted it taken to San Lorenzo, but it was too heavy for me to move. I remembered seeing Raimondo at work close by, so I went to ask if he could carry it down for me. He left his work and came to look at it, regarding me with surprise. His brown eyes were excessively round, reminding me of a bird's; he had a mass of curly black hair and a faultless complexion, which made him look younger than he was.

He inspected the stone incredulously, and remarked that there were plenty of stones farther down the mountain. However, I made it clear that I wanted this stone and no other. So thinking that this was only another freak of the signora's and that I ought to be humoured, he promised to bring it to San Lorenzo. Besides, if I ordered stones to be carted down the mountain it was none of his business—he couldn't very well refuse.

He brought it the same evening. It was a good-sized stone, weighing about forty pounds, and he deposited it on a kitchen chair. The whole family crowded round whilst I washed it. Raimondo was vastly impressed with the result.

'When you first come speak to me,' he said in English, 'I tink you make April fool, ostia, but I see now it's a fine stone. Jesus

Christ—I go many time dat road—see nudding—you go once—you find. You, signora, 'ave de intelligenza, I 'ave never been to school.'

I inquired in what state he had left the road, and he told me he had patched it up with another stone. I paid him what I thought was an adequate sum, but I think it far exceeded his expectations, and ever afterwards he treated me with a great deal of consideration. If I came to a dance he would see that I was provided with lemonade, knowing that I did not care to drink wine. He would hunt the whole village inside out to find lemons for me. If he met me on the road he would offer to carry my bag and entertain me with his wonderful English conversation. During his six years' stay in America he had been working with Yankees in the backwoods, which accounted for his knowledge of English and a certain broad-mindedness.

He had been able to save a large sum of money in America, and like Nino, he had sent it home to his father to put in the savings bank for him. Unfortunately, the same thing happened. His father drew the money out and spent it. Raimondo returned to find he was no better off than before—so he was going back to make himself another pile.

What Raimondo's father had spent the money on was a mystery. He was commonly known in the village as Cuckoo, and by sheer and persistent hard work he usually contrived to make both ends meet. He had no time to be extravagant, nor did he fancy fine clothes nor drink nor luxury. He lived with his wife and daughter and his son Tona, who played the guitar. Three other sons were in America, and doubtless sent home presents of money, so he could not have been so badly off.

.

Raimondo and Bigi by the Fontana.



One day Raimondo looked through the sketches I had made. His admiration was unbounded, and he went on saying 'ah' like a connoisseur, nodding his curly head.

'Signora,' he said at last, 'I'm only poor man—but must buy one of dese—do not ask too much, when I am in America I can look and remember . . .'

The idea of Raimondo *buying* a sketch touched me, and I gave him one at once.

Then thinking to pay me a great compliment, he said :—

'Your little girl—very fine child—marry when eleven or twelve year—not surprise me—lovely child like dat.'

.

Nino was concerned about Raimondo and so were most people. Things were not going smoothly for him. He had continual tiffs with his sweetheart, Di Marchesi Angelina. He was passionately in love with her, and although she had accepted him, she was lukewarm. She wouldn't marry him now. She would wait for a year or two years until Raimondo came back. She would not even promise to marry him at once on his return—she would see, and shrugged her shoulders. Not even the active opposition of her mother to the union—it was of the broomstick variety—made Angelina any more enthusiastic either for or against her lover.

'Angelina is stupid,' said Nino, who was sitting for me, 'there are not many others who want to marry her. It is a pity that he is so much in love with her, it frightens her a little. But she torments him.'

Then he drew a piece of paper out of his pocket and showed it

to me. It was the paper from the police court which had been so long in coming, stating the amount of his fine and the costs.

I had long ago made up my mind that I ought to pay part of that fine, but every time I saw Nino I felt I could do no such thing. He was so independent and proud. I couldn't foresee how he would take it. Perhaps he would be insulted. Anyway, it must not be put off any longer. So I said :—

'Nino, will you allow me to pay half of your fine?'

There was a long pause before he answered.

'Signora,' he said, keeping perfectly still and staring at the wall, 'I do not merit it.'

'I am very pleased to be able to help you, and it is only just that I should, considering that I was at the dance,' I answered him.

There was a very long pause.

'It would be nice for me, but not for you,' said Nino, still immovable.

There was another very long pause.

I took the money out and put it on the table. Nino didn't look.

'Signora,' he said at last, 'what shall I do to repay you?'

'There will be nothing to repay. Look, the notes are on the table, please take them.'

He reached for the notes and put them in his pocket. He never said 'thank you' nor looked at me. He got into position and sat immovable for half an hour with an expressionless face.

I felt embarrassed. Inwardly I blushed and wished I hadn't done it. It had been a blunder.

How bitter the moments when one repents.

He sat immovable and I went on pretending to draw him, in silence.

Rosina came into the kitchen and bent down to stir the cauldron on the fire close by the immovable Nino. But suddenly he came to life, and raising his left arm he gave Rosina a thumping whack on her back.

'Ü,' screamed Rosina, nearly falling into the cauldron, 'you without manners—*villano* !' and turning towards him in a threatening attitude they both burst out laughing.

I too laughed and felt relieved.

.

'Signora,' said Rosina in a hushed way, when we were alone. 'I have a letter from America, from Gaetano. It is very private, but I want you to read it.'

I took the letter, and this is what I read in Gaetano's neat and artificial handwriting :—

'DEAR ROSINA,—I have safely arrived after a fine voyage. I am pleased to say I found all friends here in excellent health. I work by contract, and can earn from ten to fifteen lire a day, but the work is unpleasant. I hope Nino will join me soon, what a consolation that will be ! I wanted to ask you to call at Signorina Samuelli's next time you go to B——. I should like to know whether she is pleased with the present I gave her, and whether she regards my letters with favour, and if you get the impression that I have a chance to win her hand. If not, I will turn my thoughts elsewhere.

'With love to all, Yours affectionately,

'BERTOLDI GAETANO.'

'That's Gaetano all over,' I commented, handing it back to her.

'Yes,' she answered, laughing, 'he always wants my help in everything. It is not so very long ago since he was here, asking me to suggest a suitable gift for the signorina. I told him to give her a workbox. Now he wants me to find out whether she liked it! . . . The signorina is just a little above his station in life, Gaetano fears she may not think him good enough. Some time ago she got him a situation as tram conductor in B—— where she lives, but Gaetano soon came back again. He said it was a dreadful life.'

'And Nino—is he really going to America?'

'He wants to, but it will be very difficult because of his blind eye.'

An official was coming along the path to the house.

'Ah, the taxes,' said Rosina.

'Is it the collector?' I asked.

'No, signora, he comes to make a list of the animals we keep.'

There was a tax on all domesticated animals except poultry and rabbits. For instance, to own a pig cost one lire, with a further tax of one lire when it was killed. Such taxes discouraged the peasants from keeping many animals.

The official was nearly prostrate with the heat and the long walk, and he sat down in a chair at the table by the door in a collapsed condition. Rosina gave him wine. Bortolo came. The official, whom I had often seen, was a friend. He pulled some papers out of his pocket and began.

'Well?' he asked limply, mopping his face.

'One cow,' said Bortolo, 'one pig, one dog.'

'Any goats?'

'No, but we are going to have one.'

'That doesn't count. Any donkeys?'

'No.'

'Anything else?'

'No.'

It was all noted down.

'I suppose,' said the official, stuffing his handkerchief round his neck inside the collar, 'that you have been telling me the truth?'

'Per Dio,' said Bortolo angrily, 'if you don't believe me go and look in the stable yourself.'

'No, no, I believe you,' said the official in a conciliatory tone, 'but I have to do my duty.' He yawned.

Then he gathered up the papers and trudged wearily on to the village.

Rosina went in to finish some shirts for the Signor godfather. Bortolo, with a large bunch of withies at his belt, went back to tie up the vines with Paolino. Riccardo dangled for a quarter of an hour in the swing before they remembered him.

.

As soon as Cristofolo stacked wood for charcoal at the farther place I went there to make a sketch. I chose the evenings and worked until dusk, giving Rosina instructions to send a search party if I was not home at a reasonable hour. The walk along the precipice always frightened me, and the only place where I could make a sketch was on the farther side of the torrent bed where Bigi had fallen. I crossed it higher up, where it narrowed, and Raimondo fixed a pole for my feet, which prevented me from slipping down.

Bigi was still unable to do much, so Raimondo was engaged for the harder work. He carried the billets lying on the torrent bed

to the hearth. It was not a job he liked, and he cursed much and loudly. Every time he passed me we exchanged a few sentences in English.

'Raimondo, is it true that you are going back to America?' I asked.

'Sure I am, lady.'

'Do you like America?'

'Jesus Christ—like it? Plenty money in America, not like 'ere —work all day for two lire, ostia—and wear dese damn zupei—wear shoes in America.' The wooden soled slippers are called zupei.

'Why did you come back from America?' I asked.

'Old people here—want to see me——' He carried a heavy load of billets on his shoulder. 'Sacramento,' he ejaculated suddenly, as he slipped on the stones, 'orca cane—I dink I were done—ostia.' He regained his foothold and a few billets rolled down. He gave a vicious kick with his feet. 'Dese damn zupei,' and he passed on to the hearth.

'And do you mean to stay in America this time?' I went on, when he came back.

'No, no, ostia, come back after two dree year.'

'When you've saved money?'

'Si, si, when I save money—now poor man, wear zupei, sacramento. Come back, marry—no women in America, ostia. Las' time I were six year in America, work in backwood, for two year never see a woman. Once tramp ten day to find my brodder. No like Italiani in America—tink bad man—no let sleep in barn—no —'ide in wood, nearly die 'unger and cold—goddam.'

It grew dark and he carried the last armful down the track,

He was so strong and full of such spirits and life, but he was quite unstrung. He spoke in the wildest way with suppressed emotion, every minute I expected him to explode. Oaths and gesticulations did not relieve his feelings. He laughed and joked, but it was only to hide the bitterness. Why wouldn't Angelina marry him? He wanted to marry at once and take her with him to America. But she wouldn't. When he pleaded she looked the other way. He was in a state which he himself aptly described as 'crazy.'

'Jesus Christ—I go mad,' he said, 'if I no get away from 'ere soon. Plenty bad people in de village—very bad—ostia. If you stay long—you get to know dem—bad, bad people. Jesus Christ—dere is some old woman—real devil—like 'ell. . . . You get to know dem—you run away—ostia.'

Up at the hearth Bigi watched Raimondo meditatively, like a father listening to the sick ravings of his child. He had great affection for Raimondo. It was not so long since he had been blasted by his own tragedy, and he could understand what Raimondo was suffering.

'When are you going?' I asked.

'Dursday—you no tell, my people cry for days—best not say.'

'And Angelina?'

'She say—perhaps, when I come back, marry—but no promise.'

The work was finished, and we walked in single file up the path to the Ridge of Houses and beyond to the fontana. Here Bigi sat down to rest, to walk was still painful. Most of the others had already passed up the road, which was deserted. Ten minutes earlier it had been full of peasants, goats, donkeys, and, of course, children.

Raimondo fidgeted, he was hungry and impatient. He handed

me my painting things, which he had carried for me, and from his buttonhole he took a rose.

'For you, signora,' he said, bowing, 'because you are a buona signora—ostia.'

.

The evening before Raimondo left, Angelina and I stood talking in a doorway. Raimondo joined us, he did not often get the chance to talk to Angelina. If he could only make her promise . . . she stood with averted face. Yes, she would marry him when he returned —provided neither he nor she had fallen in love with any one else by then. That was her line. Raimondo was not satisfied. How could he be? To make matters worse, he had a very jealous nature. Poor Raimondo, he was in despair.

Presently she went home, afraid lest her mother should catch her talking to him, and he followed her up the street.

I did not understand why she did not run away with him to America, it would have been such a fine opportunity for an adventure.

Raimondo flatly refused to take over the baggage that the Cominellis had left behind them. He wouldn't take the risk. If anything happened to it he would be held responsible, and he wasn't going to the place where the Cominellis were ; besides, bother the baggage.

Rosina was disgusted. The baggage was a continual source of trouble and annoyance to her. It led to a lengthy correspondence with Cominelli, and he wrote her long and very polite letters.

She clung to every rumour of a departure for America. Twice she walked to the village beyond Campià to persuade would-be travellers to take the baggage with them. But she was unsuccessful. The one traveller either couldn't or wouldn't, the other had never

intended to go. In the end she found some one willing to take it, and right glad she was to see the last of it.

Raimondo was going by boat direct from Genoa to New York. He passed San Lorenzo to take farewell of us, accompanied by Nino. They had been up all night, of course, talking and drinking, quite a party of them, and it was recorded as a notable fact that not one of Angelina's three brothers had been present. They did not approve of Raimondo, at least not as a brother-in-law.

Raimondo kept a cheerful if weary front whilst he was with us, but after we had parted at the gate he walked away holding his handkerchief to his eyes. He looked such a lonely figure. Nino walked by him on the other side of the road, aloof and tactful.

Farther down Bertoldi joined them, and all three went together as far as the first houses of the town. Here they parted. Neither Bertoldi nor Nino wished to go farther, as they had their work-day clothes on. Raimondo went on and was lost to sight round the corner of the church, and the two friends retraced their steps and came to San Lorenzo for refreshments.

It was eleven o'clock.

Bertoldi was a distant relation of Nino's and was also blind in one eye. He was a big man with curly fair hair and blue eyes, quite different from Nino, who was small and very dark.

They sat down in the kitchen, and Rosina brought them a large measure of wine.

Evidently the thing to do, if you have been up all night drinking and talking, is to go on drinking and talking for the rest of the day. Bertoldi and Nino talked incessantly, but their flow of conversation was neither steady nor monotonous. Sometimes they shouted

together or took offence at a chance word, or Bertoldi's anecdotes would get altogether impossible. Even Nino's blurred intellect could see that. He drank another glass and called for more wine. Bertoldi spilt some on the table as he poured it out. He was sleepy and rested his head on his arm. By the afternoon they were nearly too tired to speak, and swear words became more and more frequent.

'Women—ostia,' said Bertoldi, suddenly rousing himself. 'Women are like goats—ostia—they are mad—sacramento—they are devils—ostia—with horns—porca madonna'—he drained his glass, 'osteria—haven't two of our best boys been ruined by them?—ostia—Raimondo—ostia—he's done for—ostia—and there's Bigi—ostia—he's——'

'Don't mind me,' put in Rosina, 'say what you like about Bigi and Selina.'

She was highly entertained by this conversation. 'They are too funny, signora,' she said to me in confidence, 'stay here in the kitchen and you will be diverted.'

When it was three o'clock Bertoldi could scarcely keep awake any longer, besides, he was drunk. Nino was in a rather less pitiable condition. Rosina thought it time to interfere.

'Come, boys,' she said, with a kindly hand on each of their shoulders, 'you'd better have a sleep.'

She grasped an arm of each and led them off to the bedroom, which opened out of the parlour. There was a large bedstead in the room with a pink coverlet. It was the biggest bed I have ever seen. Bortolo and his two sons slept in it, but there was ample room for two more people.

Rosina helped the two men safely on to the bed and they dropped asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

CAVALLERI

I LOOKED with indifference at the handful of tiny silkworms Rosina brought up from the town. I had seen silkworms before, in fact I had reared half a dozen on lettuce in my schooldays.

Rosina took them upstairs into a room which stood empty. A large tray was placed ready to receive them, and she put the little crawly things on to a sheet of perforated paper about a foot square. The tray itself was very large, about ten feet by four feet, and the bottom was made of reeds put close together. Four stout poles were fixed from floor to ceiling, and along one side of each pole a number of pegs projected. A stick was laid across two pegs at either end, and the tray was supported on this stick. It could be lowered or raised at will by shifting the stick on to lower or higher pegs.

Rosina was on her knees at the open fireplace, trying to light a fire, but it would not blaze and the room filled with smoke.

'You will kill them with all this smoke,' I said, retreating towards the door, half choked.

But she thought that cold, more than smoke, would harm the cavalleri, as she called the silkworms. It was not a warm day, and the temperature of the room had to be kept between 66° and 72° F. if the silkworms were to thrive.

'This chimney never draws,' she said, puffing at the wood.

'Where did you get the cavalleri?' I asked, 'are they sold by the ounce or the gross?'

'They cost nothing, signora,' answered Rosina, still on her knees, 'they are given us by the society—but on condition that we sell them the cocoons. It is true they pay us a little less than other people, but then they send up an instructor to advise and help us. Pu! this smoke is cattivo!'

The silkworms survived the smoke. They had a good dose of it the first few days, but afterwards the weather turned warmer. In this part of Italy it was never warm enough for silkworms to be reared out of doors.

The lady instructor came up regularly every other day. She brought a large placard and pinned it on the wall. In a space for the purpose she noted down the dates when the worms shed their skins. This should take place on the 6th, 10th, 15th, and 23rd day after hatching. Badly fed silkworms are a day or so later. After inspecting the trays upstairs, the instructress went on to the village, where she had many houses to visit. Nearly every one had cavalleri.

It was an occupation which depended largely on the women, and was superintended by them. The men always assisted, but they were subordinates and did as they were told. For the time being the housewife reigned supreme and the men did not have much of a time, as you will see.

During the first two weeks Rosina cut the mulberry leaves into strips about a quarter of an inch wide, and gave them to the cavalleri like that, busying herself with them for a short time. But when they had grown bigger she gave them whole leaves and twigs.

Riccardo climbed the mulberry trees and picked the leaves,

Silkworms.



dropping them into a sack with a hoop at its mouth which he hooked to a branch. He would entirely strip a tree of its leaves, which were still small and immature. In a very short time, however, fresh leaves developed, and a tree that had been quite naked was soon clothed in green and presently stripped again.

In a short time the cavalleri spread over the large tray, and a second was brought upstairs for them. What had seemed but a handful turned out to be tens of thousands. They grew and flourished and every day they ate more, rearing up their heads and looking round for more leaves when the twigs were bare. Rosina was always giving them fresh leaves. Riccardo could not pick them fast enough, Paolino had to help him.

The perforated papers which the society provided were changed once a day, and together with the refuse were thrown on to the floor, and swept on to the balcony. They fell and fluttered down, close to the kitchen door. Bortolo did not trouble to carry them away. He was still busy in the fields, but found time to pick leaves every day. Riccardo had to help Rosina upstairs now, it was more than she could do single-handed. More and more trays were carried up, and the cavalleri grew bigger and bigger. They were in prime condition. I used to stand and listen to them gnawing at the leaves, they were so many they made a distinct noise. Rosina would pick them off the twigs with her fingers and put them on to fresh leaves. It was a tedious job; she was nearly always upstairs now.

The work told on her temper. She was very tired and very cross. She shouted at every one. Not before ten o'clock did she get to bed, and at midnight the alarm woke her and she had to get up and feed her ravenous charges again. At four o'clock the same relentless alarm

tinkled. There was no shirking. Badly fed cavalleri spin small cocoons and the society buys by weight.

By means of continuous scolding and shouting, Rosina managed to be always supplied with leaves. She would come out on to the balcony and abuse Bortolo and the boys, singly or collectively. From three different trees, in three different directions, they would raise their voices in protest. She didn't care what she said.

As for the house, it was in an awful state. Rosina neither swept nor dusted for days and days. The kitchen floor was a disgrace. There was no water in the buckets when I came to do my cooking, no one had been to the spring. There was no fire-wood in the box. Dirty dishes and plates stood about. Bortolo, who vainly tried to keep things tidy, put everything in its wrong place. . . . Even the copper pots and brass candlesticks were not polished. Rosina never neglected those cherished articles when things were normal. Now she hadn't time for anything. She made a laudable effort to wash her face and hands before dinner, but often failed. She had no time to comb her own hair, nor Pina's either. She had no time for washing clothes nor for cooking. Bortolo made the polenta, and they practically lived on that alone. Meals were at unstated intervals. Rosina had no time to sit down at table, she snatched a chunk of polenta whenever she was hungry, and ate it amongst the silkworms. For supper she made a hasty sort of minestra—but it was not nice.

Neither Bortolo nor the boys complained. They had been through it before, and knew what to expect. Besides, who would dare complain when Rosina was on the warpath?

In spite of the fact that her family was neglected and her house uncared for, Rosina could always spare a few moments to serve

customers with wine. She was never too busy for a little illicit trade, and she always had an ingratiating smile for the tourist.

I sometimes visited Rosina up in the silkworm room, which was by now her permanent abode, but she was in such a state of tension that I feared to tire her by talking. She ruled the house from the balcony or from within the room, from where she shouted her wants and instructions. Riccardo got his fair share of abuse every morning when he came up late from the town, as usual. He had to bring up the perforated papers from the society, and woe betide him if he forgot them.

By this time Bortolo had finished his work in the fields and was able to help Rosina all day and at night as well, and, of course, all three children were hard at work. It was a race between the ravenous cavalleri and the people feeding them.

Rosina was quite hoarse and the flesh round her mouth looked used and tired. She had grown very much thinner. How she longed for a night's rest—she was so tired.

We all suffered.

.

I spent a good deal of my time away from the house, but I had to walk far to get outside the radius of Rosina's voice.

'Riccardo, Riccardo—far prest, crettino—bastardo—mostro!' Such words could be heard beyond the fontana.

In the village I was amongst silkworms again. Anetta and her married daughter had some small trays of cavalleri in the kitchen, Lucia had cavalleri in her kitchen, Francesco's wife had cavalleri in an empty house, and the whole family of five grown-up people were busily employed. The Biscotti's also had cavalleri. It was a relief

to find Nino's house free of them. Teresina was peacefully knitting socks. I asked for an egg and a roll, and afterwards for some lemonade, and sat in the little kitchen with her and Bigi, and another man.

When I had finished eating I asked Teresina what I owed her.

'There is nothing to pay,' she said.

'Of course I must pay,' I answered.

'No, signora.' She looked determined.

I knew what she was driving at. She was thinking of Nino's fine, and this was her way of paying it back.

'Teresina,' I said, 'if you don't let me pay I shall be very angry. Besides—why shouldn't I—I ordered the food.'

'Signora, I could not take a palanca[1] for it, surely you can accept something . . . you have given Nino so much . . . so much tobacco.'

She did not wish to mention the fine then before the others. But I wouldn't give in. It was hateful to give with one hand, and take back with the other.

'Teresina,' I exclaimed, 'the tobacco I have given Nino he has justly earned, and if you don't let me pay,' I went on hotly, 'I can never come and order anything here again.'

'If it is a case of your getting angry,' said Teresina, 'then I will accept the money . . . the cost is four palanche.'

In other words, twopence.

'Eight palanche,' I said, 'would not be too much.'

'The bread is one palanca, the butter one palanca, and the egg two palanche. Ecco four.'

'But that is hardly cost price,' I said, suddenly recollecting that

[1] Palanca = 1 soldo = 1 halfpenny.



An Altercation.

Rosina was charging me four palanche for an egg—'they are never cheaper,' she had said—'and how about the lemonade?'

'It is thrown in.'

'And the cloth ?'

'You have not soiled it, and I can use it again.'

'And your trouble?'

'It has been no trouble.'

It ended by my paying her twopence. She took it unwillingly, and I felt that after all she had got the better of me.

It was the first of several encounters I had with her. Usually I took the precaution of paying when I ordered a thing. Once, when I forgot, she obstinately refused the money.

'Very well,' I said, and remained quiet. Presently I called to little Battisti. 'Here, Battisti—I have something for you.'

Battisti didn't come a step nearer.

Teresina came to the kitchen door, defiant.

'Signora—you must not give him the palanche. I have told him that if he takes them I will thrash him !'

What foresight she had !

She was one too many for me, but I had to give her a parting shot.

'Next time Nino sits for me, Teresina, I shall give him two whole bottles of beer.'

'Ah—signora,' and she shook her finger at me.

.

On my way home I went to the house of Bertoldi Toni, and walking down the long passage gave the usual call of approach.

'Permesso?'

'Avanti, avanti,' answered Lucia from the kitchen. She and the four girls were busy with the cavalleri.

The trays were very large and took up about one-third of the space, and excluded most of the light. The table had been carried into the passage, where they took their meals. Close to it was the door to the stairway, which led to the unsavoury courtyard, and a number of plants in pots stood on the parapet.

I felt sorry for Toni, more sorry than I felt for poor Bortolo. Bortolo at least could get into the kitchen, and it didn't smell of silkworms, nor was the cooking done in a dark place. On the other hand, Lucia was not irritable. She was always soothing, managing Toni with a few words and a little tact. Rosina's method with the peace-loving Bortolo, was to treat him to a war of words, which left him exasperated but speechless.

I must not forget to mention that Lucia was the sister of the priest, which accounted for the fact that there was a small party in the village who wanted him to stay. Moreover, there were a few who wished him gone, but daren't do anything active for fear of falling out with Toni and his wife.

Every Sunday whilst the others were at Mass, Lucia would go down into the vaulted rooms under the church where the priest lived. A stairway led up into the vestry.

The church was built on the cliff-side, and the windows of the priest's rooms looked down between thick walls on to a precipice. The garden was two narrow terraces, with a parapet and flowering bushes and roses and a large cactus in a pot. Chickens and a young turkey pecked about, running right into the kitchen.

Lucia took upon herself to make the polenta, which was always

ready the moment her brother came down from mass. I once accompanied her. The priest came down exhausted and perspiring. Whatever he may have been in private life, he conducted the church services with energy and fervour, perhaps atoning for his sins in that way. His housekeeper came down after him. She was a thin, hard, elderly female, who, it is said, drank as much as the priest did, or perhaps more. She, too, managed very cleverly to obtain wine without paying for it, and Nino's face was a study whenever she came into the inn. He daren't refuse her.

The polenta was ready, and Lucia sat on the hearthstone whilst they ate, and I too, for the priest was hospitable. But he sickened me with unpleasant jokes of double meaning. He found me very dense. After the meal he offered me a cigar.

But to return.

Lucia and the girls were changing the cavalleri on to fresh leaves, and the floor was littered with paper and refuse, faded leaves, and bare twigs. Little Emilio was toddling about trying to help, but squashing the cavalleri with his little fingers. Quite a number were in the part set aside for sick and wounded silkworms.

If the floor was untidy the inhabitants were worse. None of the children had brushed or combed her hair. All of them had dirty feet, and Emilio had a sore toe. Lucia's coiffure was from last Sunday, and would probably go on until next. They were an untidy crew, but made up for it by charm and temperament. I think it must have been Lucia who brought this untidy element into the family, as all the other Bertoldis were neat and clean. They formed the nucleus of the upper ten of the village, together with the Castellis and the Di Marchesis. They were worthy upholders of its best traditions.

Bertoldi Toni himself liked things to be spick and span, and he was very sensitive about his own appearance. He was ashamed of the patches on his trousers and of his ragged shirt. On a week-day he would slink out of the back door if he heard me coming; but when dressed in his Sunday clothes he would come and talk to me. He was ashamed, too, of his limp, and tried to hide it from me as much as possible. If we were together, he would walk a little behind me, and he could never bear to come towards me on the road. He would stand still and wait until I had passed by.

Above all things he cherished an old piano which was kept in a bedroom upstairs. He could play any tune on it, but was quite unable to read a note of music. I loved to hear him play. There was something about it which made up for lack of technique. He loved music and played from his heart. Many happy hours we spent in the room upstairs.

'La vegne sö—la vegne sö,' he would say to me on a Sunday afternoon, 'si'ora, la vegne sö,' which means 'signora, come upstairs.'

We would go up and play by turns. The piano was miserable and out of tune, but we did not heed that. Sometimes we would go to the church and play the organ.

But Toni was not at home now. Probably he was only too pleased to escape from the cavalleri and climb a tree to pick mulberry leaves, or perhaps he was up on the Ridge of Chestnuts with his son, Vittorio, carting stones to the limekiln.

I sat down in the kitchen and discussed the cavalleri. They were much bigger than Rosina's, but then, they were a different sort. Lucia said they were Chinese.

There was a good deal of competition amongst the cavalleri rearers.

I was always questioned about Rosina's worms, and when they had shed their skins, and how big they were compared with some one else's. Rosina always expected me to bring her detailed accounts of all the cavelleri I had seen in the village.

As usual, Lucia and I did most of the talking, the girls listened. Ghita once told me that listening to my conversation was the only means she had of improving her mind—which was somewhat embarrassing for me! We got on very well together; she was an interesting girl. In little things she was untruthful, but the lies were prompted by tact, and were so palpable that there was no deception.

I taught her to read music. She could pick out tunes in the way her father did, and she was very anxious to learn more. She mastered the principles of written music in a remarkably short time, and then it needed only practice. She was soon able to play easy exercises. Sometimes Toni would come upstairs and ask me to play them through from the book, in order to hear if Ghita had been practising them correctly.

'You are not like an Italian, signora,' Ghita would say, 'they never teach us anything—on the contrary, they jealously guard what they know from us. You are molta buona.'

Ghita was seventeen, a fine girl in perfect health, dark skinned, with a blush on her cheeks. The girls all had beautiful dark eyes except Carolina, who had hazel eyes, drooping lids, and a pasty face. She had none of the capability and natural tact which distinguished Vittorio and Ghita. She had been ill for many years, and after the doctors had given her up she was cured by a quack from across the lake. She looked older than Ghita, but was a

year younger. Paolino worshipped Carolina from a distance. 'Signora,' he had said to me in a burst of confidence, 'Signora, that girl is far too beautiful!'

In a short time I went back to San Lorenzo. Half-way down I met Giacomi and his wife, and a donkey laden with sacks.

'Mulberry leaves,' said the beautiful Francesca, following my glance, 'mulberry leaves for the cavalleri.'

'Have you no trees?' I asked in surprise.

'Yes,' answered Giacomi, 'I have several mulberry trees, but the cavalleri have eaten all the leaves up. So now we have to buy them.'

'How is that done?' I asked.

'You hire the tree and pick the leaves as you want them. These are from the town.'

'As far off as that?'

'Signora, that is nothing. Some years it is impossible to get leaves, and we have to send a much greater distance. . . .'

They passed on.

San Lorenzo looked very desolate.

Bortolo was making a grand mess carrying brushwood upstairs into the attic. It was for the cavalleri. The time had come for them to make the cocoons, and as soon as they showed signs of spinning, they were carried up and put on the brushwood. The whole attic was taken up with these bushes, which Bortolo carefully set up.

Besides the work of feeding the cavalleri, they now had to be closely watched. Those ready to spin had to be taken upstairs at once, before a cocoon was started, and all the trays had continually to be looked over. Even then many evaded Rosina's vigilance, and

climbing up the pole to the ceiling, were spinning in the corners of the room.

The cavalleri were put on a large tin tray which Riccardo carried up into the attic, where he distributed them carefully on the bushes, for if they got too close together double cocoons are spun. I never realised the number of cavalleri Rosina had until I saw the thousands and thousands of golden cocoons amongst the brushwood. In the uncertain light of the attic they looked like myriads of Chinese lanterns. I do not know how many there were, but if the little handful Rosina had shown me weighed not more than one ounce, there must have been nearly thirty-five thousand cavalleri. It takes quite a ton of leaves to rear as many as that.

Of course they weren't all ready to spin on the same day, a few precocious ones began and the others followed, and more and more —they were carried up to the attic day and night.

It took only a few days for the cocoons to be finished. Then they had to be carefully picked off and put into baskets. A certain number had to be freed from floss, and the pupæ kept for breeding purposes. The remaining cocoons were delivered as they were. The society announced the date for delivery, and the whole family were harder at work than ever getting all ready to time.

Rosina drooped. She was hoarse, and lacked the energy to shout, but it didn't matter, as every one was in the room with her. It was most tedious to free the pupæ from floss. They were put on a board with an iron rod across it, and one of the boys turned the handle. The cocoons were tipped up against the rod and the threads caught on it, and yard after yard gradually wound off. The boys turned the handle all day, even Pina had to help. Bortolo kept

running up to the attic to pick the cocoons off the brushwood. Then he came down and made the polenta, and they all ate chunks of it upstairs.

.

At last it was over and fresh flowers stood before the little image of St. Antonio on the landing.

Rosina, strengthened by a night's rest, was polishing copper pots in the kitchen. She was dismally thinking of her work that was so behindhand. There was so much washing she would have to ask Ghita to help her with it; there was mending to be done, there was sewing, there was Selina to whom she hadn't written for weeks. The whole house needed a clean up, and next week the weary work of bottle-washing must be begun. She hadn't been to mass for weeks. Madre mia, what slavery! She would never look at a silkworm if it wasn't for the money . . . one had to have money . . . and there were debts. How they weighed on her; not so Bortolo, he was always tranquillo, nothing ever disturbed *him* . . . it was she—she who had to think of everything. . . .

And the cavalleri? The work, from start to finish, had covered forty days, and Rosina's cocoons had weighed fifty-six kilograms. The society paid four lire the kilo—so Rosina had earned exactly 224 lire, which is all but £9.

CHAPTER IX

LIME BURNERS

BERTOLDI TONI was burning lime. For weeks past he and his son Vittorio had been carting stones and building up the furnace on the Ridge of Chestnuts. It was a singularly barren spot, and the chestnut-trees, after which it had been named, were long ago hewn down and had left no descendants.

One afternoon I walked up to see what Toni was at. As I struggled up the steep path I caught sight of Vittorio wheeling a barrow, but when I arrived at the top he had disappeared. The barrow was still there, together with some runners for dragging stones, but Vittorio was gone. He was shy, I knew that, and had gone off to avoid me. I looked round and wondered where he had hidden himself. Close by was a heap of stones, and the beginnings of the kiln and beyond, right up to the crags, was an unbroken slope of loose stones. Behind me was a precipice. On my left a path followed the edge. Trees were growing half-way down the cliff, and I could see Giuseppe in very blue trousers hewing them down. The place was so steep he had to cling to a tree with one hand whilst he hacked at the next one, and tree after tree went crashing down the slope.

I walked along the path until it was cut in two by a dry torrent bed. I concluded people walked over it, for I could see the path go on beyond a few feet away. The torrent bed bore no sign of footsteps,

probably the stones rolled down when they were touched. It was very steep, and I could see the edge of the cliff at the bottom. Here the water came to the surface, trickled over and splashed down on to the rocks by the roadside, forty feet below. Last spring, a landslip had buried the road at this point, and Riccardo had barely escaped with his life.

I went back. Giuseppe saw me, and ceased his chopping to shout a greeting. Far below him I could see San Lorenzo, and heard Rosina abusing Riccardo. . . . But I didn't find Vittorio. How any one so big could hide in such a place I do not know.

One day Rosina informed me that Toni had already lighted the fire of the kiln, but she advised me not to go up until the evening, as the flames looked best in the dark. So I waited until after supper before toiling up the path. It had been mended and improved so that a wagon could get nearly as far as the kiln, but the last part of the road was impossible of much improvement, it was much too steep, and I floundered rather than walked up it.

Toni caught sight of me, and I could hear him say to his companion, 'La si'ora—è venü la si'ora,' and he greeted me warmly when I arrived at the top. Tona, who was working for him, was equally cordial. Vittorio, they told me, and the expert from afar who knew all about lime-burning, were asleep now. They took their turn to work whilst Toni and Tona rested.

The stones had been built up into a large hollow bee-hive structure, which was embedded in the slope, except the front and part of the sides. The furnace glowed within, and could be seen through a small square opening. A rough roof covered the space in front. At the side was an enormous stack of faggots.

Tona was the right sort of man for lime-burning. He was strong, tough, and patient, and, what was also very important, he never shirked anything.

Toni dusted a large stone and bade me sit down. It was exceedingly hot so close to the furnace, but it was a good place from which to watch, and get some idea of the work.

Toni picked up one end of a long thick iron rod which lay on the ground. It was about twelve feet long. Tona brought a bundle of faggots and jammed it into the opening. Toni raised the rod and fixing it in the faggot pushed it through. It went unwillingly and dropped on to the hearth, which was at a lower level. Then it stood on end, crackled, roared, and toppled over, adding its remains to the heap of white hot ash which lay vibrating. The blaze dazzled my eyes. Then another faggot went in, and another and another. Occasionally there was a short respite, but the furnace had to be continually fed for five days and nights.

They took it in turns to put the faggots in, the other climbed up to throw down bundles from the stack, or rested on a stone near the furnace.

It was very fascinating to watch the faggots go in and be consumed. Sometimes a big and obstinate one would refuse to be pushed through the opening, but usually there was no trouble, and the flames would blaze up and change from green to yellow and pink, and then break out blue again.

I wanted to try to put in a faggot, but Toni would not hear of it. I would be scorched, he said, I had not the strength; but first and last I would be scorched. It was impossible. I asked whether my trying would in any way spoil the burning, but he shook his head.

There was nothing to spoil. The furnace must be fed, that was all, but he could not allow me to be burnt.

We went up the slope, and he showed me the furnace glowing through the stones on the roof, every now and then breaking into little blue flames. Close by was the bunk where Vittorio and the expert were sleeping. It was quite dark, and the mountain towered black and solid above us.

'It will be fine to-morrow,' remarked Toni, looking at the stars. It was important that it should be, and he was a little nervous and anxious. I don't think he spent many hours in the bunk resting during the following days.

We walked down, and I went to the edge and looked away to the distant lights of the town. Below were trees, and I could feel them in the downy blackness. San Lorenzo lay invisible and silent. Riccardo must have gone to sleep by the fire.

I turned and walked back to the patch of light where Tona was working. Toni was nowhere to be seen. This was my chance.

'Come on, Tona,' I said with determination, 'a faggot!'

'Yes, signora,' was all he said. There was something in these people which always responded to a command. He fetched a bundle and put it at my feet. I had hoped he would have stuffed it into the opening for me, but as he hadn't, I picked it up and tried to myself. It was frightfully hot so near the furnace, and at first I couldn't get it in because the sticks all spread out and caught on the wall and it would not go into the opening. It set on fire whilst I was trying. Then I stepped back, and, seizing the rod, lifted it, and, thrusting it into the faggot, pushed. The rod ran right through it, but the faggot never budged.

Tona watched me silently, never attempting to help or advise. But I felt that the whole honour of England was at stake, and that I simply must do the thing.

After several futile thrusts with the unwieldy rod it caught in the faggot and through it went. I ran it into the centre of the hearth—then quickly drawing back the rod, I retreated, for my hands were nearly at the furnace mouth, and the rod was getting too hot.

Tona laid another faggot at my feet. I had not done so badly then. It went in more easily and so did a third and a fourth. I seemed to have caught the trick. But my arms were tired, the rod was so heavy. Tona brought me a fifth faggot and I felt I had scarcely strength enough to tackle it. However, in it went, in grand style—but I was utterly exhausted.

'It is enough,' I said, and putting down the rod turned round. Toni was standing next to Tona. I felt like a naughty child caught in the act, but Toni's face reassured me. His blue eyes shone with admiration.

'Well done, si'ora,' he said, 'I never doubted you could do it.'

'Orca cane,' exclaimed Tona, 'she did it as if she had never done anything else all her life.'

'The expert said he'd never seen anything like it——'

'The expert?' I asked. 'I thought he was asleep——'

'So he was, si'ora, but when I saw what you were doing I awoke him and Vittorio—they watched you from above.'

Ah, that was why Tona had been so liberal with the faggots.

It was hard work and I did not envy the men. Toni was quite right, one could get badly scorched, it was inevitable if one worked

for hours. Hands and arms were continually exposed to frightful heat, the rod became heated and sparks flew about on to one's clothes. But neither Toni nor Tona were downhearted, they worked on steadily and cheerfully.

.

I went up to see them every evening. Each time Toni and Tona looked grubbier and the worse for wear. They wore the shabbiest clothes for a job like this, because everything got spoilt. Toni grew thin with worry and fatigue—he couldn't trust any one but himself; when he rested, I don't know.

On the fourth night I was amazed to find Toni and Tona in spotless, clean shirts. It was so surprising that I stood and stared. It seemed so out of place, these two grubby men on the mountain side in clean shirts beautifully ironed.

So this was the result of my insatiable curiosity! Dear, sensitive Tona was ashamed that the signora should see him in his rags. He would never have changed if he hadn't expected me to come. . . . No sane man would change his clothes the last day of lime burning. And what was more wonderful, he had persuaded Tona to do the same, only Tona had gone one better and changed his trousers as well.

I stood and gazed, feeling grateful and guilty in one. After all, Toni and Tona hadn't many shirts. . . .

We talked together for a while. Toni was restless and anxious. Things were not going quite as they should, the lime ought to be ready in another twelve hours, but it didn't look as if it would be. Toni mopped his face in a perplexed way. They were going to rake out the ashes now, and Tona went off to fetch a long-handled iron tool. I retreated to a safe distance and stood watching.

They worked together, both holding the long tool, pushing it forwards and backwards, to and fro, until the whole hearth was disturbed. A heap of ashes was raked through the opening, the heat from them was tremendous, and every inflammable thing caught fire. Their hands passed close over the ashes. At last, when the handle was too heated to be held any longer they stopped, and Toni put it aside. Tona carried the ashes away on a shovel and they both stamped out the flames that had sprung up round about.

Another faggot was run in and Toni stood watching—as soon as he had his breath back he went running up to the top again. What was wrong? At this stage the flames at the top ought to have been higher and steadier. Instead they flared up as each faggot went in and then died down. They oughtn't to do that—but why did they? Toni didn't know. He was afraid something was wrong, perhaps the whole thing would turn out a failure. . . .

.

The next evening, which was Saturday, I found them still at work, although the job should have been finished by midday.

Lucia was there. She stood well back from the kiln, a dark, dishevelled figure against the night sky, her face glowing in the light from the furnace. She scarcely moved.

Tona was stoking, Toni was up at the top, watching the flames. They shot up as each faggot went in, and were sucked back and flared out of the opening below where Tona stood, and then blazed out again at the top. In and out they flared, making an alarming roar —like a giant out of breath. Something was wrong, I could see that.

Toni turned and came down towards us. A glance at his face

showed me that he was living through moments of intense anxiety. He was wellnigh exhausted with work and lack of sleep. I went and stood beside Lucia, and we watched without speaking. From where we stood we could watch the faggots put in, as well as see the flames flare out at the top. We were on the brink of a black abyss.

Toni feared the worst. The perspiration trickled down his blackened face. He spoke frequently to Lucia in an excited way—just a few words, with a gesticulation and a shrug. She answered quietly and sympathetically. Sometimes he just caught her eye, and she would answer with a look. How well she understood him. She must have been very anxious herself, yet she was splendidly calm and gentle; her presence buoyed him up. She hardly noticed me, nor did I speak to Toni, but I had a few words with Tona.

He told me that the lime ought to have been ready, but that something was wrong, and the fire would have to be kept up until the morning, he supposed. It was possible that the lime was spoilt, but it was not at all certain. He himself didn't think it was.

All the time the flames rocked to and fro. Toni could hardly trust Tona to put in the faggots, he worked nearly all the time himself. Tona was disgusted—didn't he know how to stoke just as well as Toni? Toni was too fussy. He was sick of doing nothing but fetch faggots, and Toni was only wearing himself out. In spite of his annoyance he treated Toni with the greatest consideration.

'You must be tired by now,' I said to Tona.

'Signora,' he answered, just a little scornfully, 'I am never tired. But I shall be pleased when it's over.'

Toni's anxiety irritated him. I was also infected by it. My heart beat quickly and I felt half suffocated. Poor Toni, his mouth

trembled when he spoke, and it would not need much more to send the tears streaming down his face.

What an awful disaster if anything happened to the lime. It was his chief source of income, and he had spent weeks getting it ready. Every spare day and every Sunday he had been in the town looking for buyers. But he wasn't thinking of that, his thoughts were for the future. . . . He mopped his face and spoke to Lucia in jerks. He was irritable to the last degree—but not with her. She looked at him, and her look was hopeful in a deferential sort of way, as if it were treason to hope when he was in such despair. There was something great over her that evening and over Toni too, for there was nothing petty in his anxiety. They were in such contact with each other.

I left them with a heavy heart.

.

Next morning we all went to mass together. Even Rosina was of the party. On Sunday mornings she could usually think of nothing but preparing dinner, but to-day she had a pious turn. Once before I had been to mass with her, and on that occasion she had been very dissatisfied with me.

'It is not usual,' she had said, 'to sit down flop in your seat—like you did—without first kneeling and saying a prayer. Secondly, you should not stare at the organist the whole time.' (It had been the first time I had heard Toni play, and the way he rattled through the tunes was fascinating.) 'Now you know you did; about the Holy Water I shall say nothing.'

'As for you,' I had retorted, 'you didn't kneel half as much as the others.'

'Signora—when you are as fat as I am——'

'Heaven preserve us!'

Here Bortolo put in a word. 'The signora is at liberty to behave as she likes.' The old dear always took my part, but he was so serious we both burst out laughing.

As we walked up to mass we came unexpectedly on Toni. He was standing by his front door, dressed in his shabby Sunday clothes. His face was washed, and he looked as fresh as if he'd had a holiday. He smiled at us.

'Toni,' I called, 'and what happened to the lime?'

'It turned out all right after all,' he said, 'we finished this morning.' He looked quite happy.

'And you've had a sleep?'

'Sleep, signora?'

'Yes—after all that fatigue. Aren't you tired?'

'Perhaps,' he answered, 'but we didn't get home until after breakfast, and I play the organ at mass, and again at the afternoon service. It will be time to sleep when the night comes.'

I remembered yesterday evening and his haggard face. I suppose the relief at finding the lime unspoilt had been as good as a night's rest to him.

We passed on and entered the church. During the service an incident occurred which did not add to the popularity of the priest. All went as usual until that part of the service had been reached where the priest sits in the large chair by the altar whilst the organist plays and we all listen.

With a sudden movement the priest got up out of his chair and walked quickly down the altar steps to where the congregation sat.

He pounced upon a boy sitting in the front row, seized him by the collar, and hit him several times viciously on the head . . . then he walked back and sat down again in the large chair by the altar.

The men, who all sat in the front benches, became rigid and a great silence fell over the congregation. Anger took the place of amazement. The benches creaked. What would the priest do next? Women shyly exchanged glances, but the men stared stolidly in front of them, nursing angry thoughts. How long must they put up with that priest? How dare he . . . ! The boy had only been whispering to his neighbour.

Toni played on, and the priest continued the service. After receiving his blessing we all walked out into the piazza. Rosina, her thoughts fixed on dinner, hurried me back to San Lorenzo.

CHAPTER X

THE FESTIVAL OF THE MADONNA

THE morning was clear and beautiful.

It was the second Sunday in July, the day specially set apart for the Festival of the Madonna. The holy image was to be carried in procession through the street of Campià, and there was to be a special service and every one would beseech God and the Holy Virgin to stave off the great calamity, and let this year at least be free from a devastating hailstorm. Everything was being done to make the day acceptable to God, there was no one in Campià who underrated its importance. Raimondo, just before he left for America, told me that it was the plain duty of every one to subscribe to the Festival Fund, and when a few days later a peasant called with the subscription list we all gave something. Sums from a half to two and a half lire had been subscribed, so Rosina, who aspired to be better than her neighbours, gave three.

Long before ten o'clock we started for the village, but it was already hot and there was very little shade on the road. Rosina and the boys carried large baskets full of provisions, for they had no intention of returning to San Lorenzo before night. The Cominelli's house was still empty, and Rosina meant to cook the meals there. To judge by the large number of wine bottles, she must also be hoping to do a little illicit trade.

The band struck up before we reached the first houses and the children hurried on. Rosina, however, could not be hurried. She flapped her handkerchief over her face, and perspired and groaned, and implored me to walk slower. At last we reached the Cominelli's house, and she threw open the doors and shutters and busied about.

I stood on the back stairway which led to the courtyard and enjoyed the sun. It seemed to saturate the white buildings and everything was hot to the touch. Across the water Monte Moro looked cool and majestic.

All at once some one began to sing next door, beginning boldly in the middle of a song :—

'Guarda che bel colore
Senti che buon profumo——'

'Ghita,' I shouted, 'Ghita.'

'Ah, it is la signora,' she said, coming into the stairway and leaning her arms on the parapet. 'You *are* getting sunburnt,' she remarked.

'Yes,' I answered, rather proud of my tanned skin, 'look at my arms.'

'Italian ladies,' she said, 'are afraid of the sun.'

'Yes—I've seen them,' I answered, 'they all look as if they'd been brought up in the cellars.'

Ghita laughed, and her white teeth shone in the sun. Then she picked a faded carnation from one of the pots on the parapet and threw it down into the yard.

'Then you must think my dark skin quite beautiful? I've always been ashamed of it!'

'If you weren't in good health,' I answered, 'you wouldn't have such a glorious colour.'

'You are right,' she said, 'the signore are always ailing.' Just then the band struck up another tune. 'Let's go to hear the music together, I won't be a moment.'

I walked down the passage into the shady street and round to the front door of their house. I had meant to go in and wait for Ghita, instead, I stood looking up the street.

What were they hanging out of the windows? I could see Giacomina busy upstairs. She was holding out a bedspread, a beautiful thing all red and yellow. She let it hang right down and on the sill; in order to keep it in place, she put a pillow, an ordinary pillow, in a clean white pillow-case. Every house was being decorated in the same way. Just above me, from the window of the room where Toni kept the piano, hung a large white bedspread. Next door, the house of Renzi Faustino, there were several windows and not enough bedspreads to go round, it seemed. The girl had just hung out a dark blanket and was suspending a lace curtain over it. Then she put a pillow on the sill, just as Giacomina had done, and as every one else was doing. Some of the pillow-cases had pink check covers, and a very few were pale blue.

It was a simple but very effective form of decoration. The whole street looked gay. No doubt housewives vied with each other in the possession of bright bedspreads, and I understood now why Giacomina had once shown me the red and yellow one with such pride; it was one of her most cherished possessions.

I did not wait for Ghita, but walked on to the fountain. The street had been swept and tidied. Decorative arches had been put

up at intervals, covered with green twigs and paper flowers. A prickly plant,[1] which grew higher up on the mountain, had been gathered and dipped in whitewash. Stuck among the green it looked like silver.

There was a good sprinkling of people by the fountain, but the street leading to the piazza was crowded. A great many villagers were there, and a great many other people who had come from neighbouring places. On every side I saw happy, expectant faces. Every one was dressed in their best, all the male part of the population had on new shirts, or they ought to have, for such was the custom. Rosina had sat up until midnight finishing shirts for the boys. The women all had their hair carefully dressed, and lovely thick hair they had too, but the men usually grew prematurely bald on account of their habit of always wearing a hat, both indoors and out. I once asked Nino whether he slept with his hat on, but he shook his head. I am certain, however, that he never took his hat off until he was in the bedroom, and that first thing in the morning it was clapped on again.

The band, which had finished playing in the piazza, came trooping up the street to the fountain, and formed up in a circle. People crowded after and stood round whilst it played. One or two favoured small boys were allowed to stand within the ring and hold up a sheet of music. After playing a few tunes the band trooped off to the new road and played a few tunes there, and then off again to another spot.

I met Nino in the road and greeted him.

'Tell me,' I asked, 'the procession is to be this morning, isn't it?'

[1] Butcher's-broom.

'No, signora, between four and five this afternoon.'

'But why so late?'

'Because,' he answered, 'it will be hot, and the Madonna is heavy.'

The bells pealed out and every one moved towards the church, where two babies were being christened. The band had taken up its place close to the doors and was playing a gay tune. We loitered in the sunny piazza until the tune was finished.

Then we hurried into the church, anxious to find a seat. Men and boys crowded in at the side door, the women all entered the large door at the back. Every seat was filled.

Coming from the bright sunshine the church seemed like a cavern, but my eyes soon became accustomed to the mysterious dimness. I could see the decorations and the suspended draperies, and the special altar which had been erected in the body of the church. On it stood the image of the Madonna, dressed in blue and silver.

Mass was conducted by two priests from neighbouring villages, and although present our priest took but a minor part. Toni was absent from the organ loft, his place being taken by a blind organist, specially engaged for the occasion. He played very well, but I missed Toni's spirited tunes.

Beside me sat two girls. They both wore hats, and for this reason they ought to have been ladies, for no peasant woman wore a hat in church; but their manners betrayed them. The stout one, with a cast in her eye, wore a fawn dress in tolerably good taste, but the younger, dark and slim, had on a pink hobble skirt and a cheap lace blouse. They whispered together during the service, grinned at each

other, and spent very little time on their knees. It was just affectation of manner, for I am sure they reckoned themselves to be pious. If you wear a hat you must behave like a lady, and once having exchanged the village for the town, they did not feel they could come back and behave like they used to. What a pity it was that they were unable to discriminate between ladies, and took as a model upstarts like themselves.

Before the end of the service, several women hurried out to attend to their respective dinners. No sooner had they left the building than the bandsmen hurried after them, so that when mass was over and we all came out into the sunlight, the band was in the piazza and welcomed us with a sentimental waltz, even before the last strains of the organ had died away.

Girolomo was a person of importance, he had the responsibility of all the arrangements. He walked about overflowing with goodwill, in his hand a piece of paper covered with notes in a large hand. He was responsible for the band amongst other things, and had to see that it was supplied with plenty of wine. He had ready a storeroom for the instruments when not in use, and in order that the bandsmen should be properly provided with dinner, he had billeted them out on various families. Just now he stood in the piazza, a large tray in his hands. On the tray were tumblers filled with wine which he was offering the bandsmen, and coaxing them to take. A table had been brought out, and Gioan stood by it filling up more glasses. Then he collected the tumblers and carried them indoors to be rinsed. None of the women took any part in the matter.

Those who had no dinner cares strolled about in the heat, looking for friends. I saw Gheco with his mother and Appollonia, and with

them were Apollonio's mother, sister, and brother. It was significant that they should be together—it pointed to an engagement, or at least to the first preliminaries between the parents of Apollonio and Gheco.

All at once the piazza emptied. It was dinner time.

I found Bortolo giving the final stir to the polenta. Even on this great day every one ate polenta. Every housewife spread a clean white cloth on the dinner table. Rosina had prepared a tame rabbit with herbs and fat, butter, and oil, and fried onions, which was delicious.

No sooner had we finished the meal than a deputation came in to ask whether the room might be used for a dance. Rosina made no objection and the room was cleared. A fat man in velvet trousers, carrying an accordion, came in and began to play. The company were all strangers to me, so I did not remain. Instead I strolled up the street, which was still empty. Sounds of talking and laughter came from all the houses.

After paying a visit to Giacomina I went on to the inn. It was crowded. Teresina was bustling about with glasses, taking orders. Nino and his old father were busy bringing bottles up from the cellar, and carrying empty ones away. People came in, drank, and went out, and there was seldom a vacant chair. Every one asked for beer, and when the supply ran out they ordered lemonade, until every bottle was sold. Wine was the last thing they desired.

I sat down close to the door. Teresina at the other end of the room caught my eye, and raised her eyebrows as much as to say 'lemon squash?' I nodded in answer.

Close by three men were playing murra, quite unconcerned at

the noise they made. They were Cristofolo's two sons-in-law, and a third man who was a stranger. I guessed him to be the rich grocer from Florence, Dominica's husband. He could not speak the dialect but played murra in Italian, and probably, out of consideration for their guest, the other two did so as well. Instead of the familiar 'ü, du, tre, quater, sich, sei, set, ot, neuf,' big Giuseppe, in a chastened way, was calling 'uno, due, tre, quattro, cinque,' etc. It worried him so much that he lost.

As I was finishing my lemon squash, Nino came and spoke to me.

'Signora, forgive me,' he said, 'I have so little time to talk to you to-day—you see how busy I am. We never expected such a crush, so many people have never been to the festival before. If only I had another hundred bottles of beer. . . . You were at mass?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'and I am wondering why the priest hadn't troubled to shave.'

'You are not the only one to say that,' said Nino, and then, leaning across the table, he whispered, 'perhaps he was too drunk to hold a razor!'

'Nino—don't' . . . I protested. 'When every one else is so tidy I was surprised to see his face with a six days' stubble. No doubt he means to grow a beard.'

'Oh, yes—likely,' he answered sarcastically, going off to serve a customer. Presently he was back again.

'Did you hear what my father-in-law said to him? . . . He met him in the street and said: "I suppose you are going to shave for the afternoon service?" They all listened for a reply, but the priest never answered him at all.'

'Can you tell me who those two girls are,' I asked, 'one in a pink skirt—the other fat, with a cast in her eye?'

'Ah—Negretti's two girls——' I could see by his face that he did not care for them. I waited for further information. 'They are back for a holiday,' he went on, 'they work as milliners in B——. They pretend to be ladies.'

'So I see——'

'They come and put on airs—and hardly any one is good enough for them to look at. They are not a bit like you.'

'No,' I answered, 'they are much more elegant.'

'Signora,' said Nino, resting his arms on the table, 'you may wear an old dress, but you have money in your pocket. *It is that which counts.* Their elegance is scarcely skin deep, and their pockets don't contain a palanca. . . . Those girls have to starve themselves in order to satify their vanity.'

'One of them looks quite fat,' I remarked.

'Perhaps—but they lead a dog's life in order to dress like ladies. They think then they are better than we are. . . . There is nobody I should like to kick more! You, signora, you talk to us all, it makes no difference to you whether we are poor or not, you treat every one the same. But those girls, who were born here, walk through the village not deigning even to notice some of their neighbours!'

The church bells rang and I hurried back to Cominelli's house. The dancers were crowding down the passage into the street. Rosina was putting the finishing touches to the two little girls. They were to take part in the procession. Both wore white dresses with wreaths on their heads and flowing ribbons.

The church was even more crowded than in the morning, many

more people having come to the village during the afternoon. Several pews were set apart for the girls taking special part in the procession. They were in white, and two whole benches were filled with children dressed up to look 'like angels.'

The service, which was conducted at the special altar in the body of the church, was very short. It was followed by a sermon. Our priest sat listening to the preacher with the most benign expression on his face, nodding his head from time to time. It was a pity he hadn't shaved.

At the close of the service Ghita sang a solo. Too shy to stand up by the organist where she could be seen, she crouched down behind the barricade. She had a nice voice and sang with such simple devotion that it touched everybody.

The large doors at the back of the church were then thrown open and the sunshine streamed in. The female part of the congregation stood up and walked out, and formed into two lines of single file with a space in between. At intervals in this space walked girls and youths carrying banners and other emblems.

Ghita headed the procession, dressed in white with a white veil and carrying a big bouquet of flowers. Pina walked on one side of her and my little girl on the other, both clutching her skirts.

The procession walked slowly across the piazza and into the shady street, chanting the same dismal Litany that I had heard when the fields were blessed. Girolomo was busy putting every one in their places, and he came running past us in order to ask Ghita not to walk so fast. He was very hot.

When all the women had come into line, the band formed up three abreast, trumpeting a martial tune which more than half

drowned the Litany, and was in quite a different key, not even a minor one. No one, however, paid any attention to that.

After the band came little children hand in hand, carrying nosegays, and behind them, under a large canopy, walked the three priests in gorgeous vestments, and the little boys carrying censers.

Then came the image of the Madonna. It was carried on a stretcher supported by four youths. Nino was right, the Madonna was heavy. She was topply too, and had to be supported on either side by a man, tall enough to reach the brass rod of her canopy.

The rear of the procession was brought up by two single files of hatless men.

We walked, chanting, down the street, past Giacomina's house and the red and yellow bedspread, past Toni's and Cominelli's, right into the sunlight, where the new road branched off along the edge of the cliff back to the church. The new road was very wide and under a large green archway stood a common table. We passed it by, but when the priests reached that point they stopped, and the image, swaying as the youths staggered along, was carefully placed on the table. The band stopped playing.

The priests recited prayers, and we knelt where we stood, and prayed and beseeched the Madonna to keep off the hail.

Then we rose to our feet and walked slowly on, chanting again. The band struck up another martial tune. Pina, forgetting the occasion and hearing only the band, tripped along with light steps, still clutching Ghita's skirts. On nearing the church, we could hear the organ pealing forth yet another tune. It was a strange medley of sounds.

We crowded in, and the Madonna was put back on the altar.



Ghita.

Ghita's two youngest sisters stood before the image and recited. Afterwards every one filed past the priest, and kissing the Relic he held in his hand, followed one another out of the church.

The band was playing in the piazza. It was a little cooler. The sun was hidden behind the crags, and would not be seen again to-day. The sky was pale and clear. We strolled about, speaking to friends and listening to the music. Several women were hanging out of upstairs windows talking to friends below. From the inn came the sounds of murra.

Every one was and looked happy. It had been a successful day, una bella festa. The villagers were flattered by the number of strangers who had come, the strangers were more than satisfied with the hospitality and goodwill of the people of Campià. The bandsmen considered that they had been so well treated that they even *offered* to come and play at an autumn festival for no remuneration!

The two policemen, who had paid a formal visit to the village during the afternoon, went back to the town whilst it was broad daylight. It was not thought necessary that they should remain in the village during the evening.

Toni sought me out in the piazza, he wanted to hear me speak English with a relation of his, who had been to America. It thrilled Toni to listen, understanding not a word. Perhaps he would have been surprised if he had understood what we were so seriously discussing. After a few preliminary sentences we spoke as follows:—

'Any bugs in England?' asked the relation.

'Bugs? . . . oh, yes, of course, there are bugs in England,' I answered.

'Also in America,' he informed me, 'plenty bugs everywhere, but in Italia, no.'

'There are no bugs here at all?' I asked.

'No, nowhere in dese parts—but plenty fleas,' he went on.

'Yes,' I answered, 'and papatas,' referring to the little midges which infested my room at night.

Our conversation, perhaps fortunately, was broken off by Giacomina. She wanted me to come to Cristofolo's house and make the acquaintance of his daughter Dominica from Florence. We started off, but remained to loiter, because the band was playing its last tune. The bandsmen came from a village eight miles away. they had walked over in the morning, and were walking all the way back now. They were given a very cordial farewell.

Some of the visitors from more distant villages had already left —others were leaving. A good many were spending the night in the village, and some of the people from the town stayed until quite late, and went home together in a party. The street was still crowded and every one was strolling there or looking out of the windows overlooking it. A few careful housewives were taking in their bed-spreads.

Giacomina took my arm and we walked up the street with a word for nearly every one we met. Rosina called out that she was just going to get supper at Cominelli's, would I come in half an hour, and continued an animated discussion with Stefen.

I was stopped by a stranger, who told me that he knew me quite well, but was quite sure I'd never seen him. He laughed at my puzzled expression, and then explained that he was the expert who had helped Toni burn the lime—he had watched me put in the

faggots. A friend called him and he passed on. We turned up the mountain road and the crowd thinned. Outside Cristofolo's green gate the road was empty.

A large party was assembled in Cristofolo's kitchen, most of them relations. They sat on chairs round the walls. In a corner Bigi was playing the mandoline to Tona's strummed accompaniment.

I was introduced to Dominica and her husband, and to a friend of hers from London, an Italian lady whose husband kept a laundry in Soho.

I liked Dominica. I had expected her to be a little pretentious and overdressed perhaps, like the two girls I had seen in church, but Dominica was not like them. It is true her clothes were costly and fashionable, but they were in good taste and she knew how to wear them. She was not beautiful, nor a bit like Bigi or her sisters, but very tall, pale, and reserved. The thing which most struck me about her, was the admiration her husband showered upon her. He was sitting by her now, holding her hand, and looking unutterably docile. It was evident that she lived in the sunshine of his unconcealed admiration, and to keep it from becoming embarrassing she was a little haughty with him—just to keep him in his place.

There was another stranger in the room, Teschini, a friend of Dominica's husband, who also kept a store in Florence.

I sat down by the lady from Soho. She was very beautiful, wore big pearl ear-rings and a scarlet overall over her dress. I spoke English to her and Dominica, and we made pleasant remarks, and drank vermouth.

'Ah,' sighed the lady from Soho, thankful to be amongst her own countrymen again, 'Italians are jolly—arn't dey? Never dull.'

'No,' I answered, thinking of the hail, 'nothing seems to damp their spirits.'

Then turning to Dominica she said loudly, 'De signora is a person of education—a lady—I can 'ear dat by de way she talk English.'

Bigi struck up a tune, the table was put on one side and we had a few dances. Then thinking of Rosina's soup, and that Annetta might be waiting for me to go before she began her preparations for supper, I took my leave and found Rosina looking up the road for me. She had already ladled the soup into plates which stood steaming on the table. Bortolo had gone home to milk the cow, the boys were somewhere in the village, she said—she didn't know where.

'I suppose,' said Rosina, blowing her soup, 'that you have heard that there will be dancing to-night—in the house opposite.'

'But isn't it empty?' I asked, half expecting to hear that it was inhabited. Several desolate looking houses in the village, which I had taken to be empty turned out, on investigation, to be occupied. I could never tell from the outside.

'Yes—it is empty,' she said, trying to sip the hot soup from her spoon, which she held with an elbow on the table. 'It belongs to Gheco, but he prefers to live in the house down by his lands.'

'The accordion won't play, I hope,' I remarked.

'No, signora, it will be our own players. . . . Here,' she went on, stretching out the bottle—'have some wine.' . . . I held out my glass which she filled. 'Why don't the boys come to supper? It is strange that they never can do as they are told. . . .'

'You would find life very dull,' I answered, 'if Riccardo was a good and obedient boy.'

Rosina laughed.

'Ecco,' she went on presently, 'I hear the mandoline. . . . Signora—you will burn yourself if you eat so quickly!'

It was not long before I ran up the outside stairway, and stood in the kitchen of Gheco's house. The players were sitting in a corner, but not many dancers had come yet. La Macuccia sat on a chair fanning herself, and I sat down beside her. She was full of a letter received from her youngest son, who had been three months in America. 'He is doing well,' she told me proudly, 'he has sent money this time, *four hundred francs*—there is money in America—have you seen my other son, the policeman?—he is home for a few days on leave.'

I had not met her son.

'No doubt you have seen him,' she said, continually fanning herself and me by turns, 'he wears a white suit.'

I knew whom she meant, and it was not long before I danced with him. Introductions are not necessary at Campià, you dance with whomever asks you to, but of course you can always refuse.

Apollonia scandalised some people by dancing. They said it was much too soon after her father's death, but she had her own opinion on the subject. She wanted to learn, and Gheco had been teaching her the steps. . . .

Sometimes when we were too hot and out of breath, some one would stand up and sing, and those not too exhausted would join in the chorus. Of course 'Tripoli' was sung—twice over. At other times we sat out on the balustrade or the stairs, where it was a little cooler than indoors. It was a calm evening, the sky was cloudless and the stars shone bright. The moon was just rising.

Some of the younger men had been pulling down the triumphal arches and carrying them away to the new road. Here they had made a glorious bonfire, and all the village children had thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Most people were indoors now. The two inns were crowded, and I could hear the sounds of murra from more than one house, otherwise the streets were very quiet. The young men came back from the bonfire and sat down by the fountain to sing. They sang in parts and it was a pleasure to listen. As each song was finished, clapping was heard, and from dark doorways unseen listeners cried 'bravi.' Now and then some one came clattering down the mountain road and passed down the street into the shadows. The moon rose higher and began to shine on one side of the street.

Punctually at ten o'clock the inns closed, and the men came out and dispersed. This was Rosina's golden hour. Some of the thirstier souls found their way into Cominelli's kitchen, and Rosina fetched out her wine bottles. Gioan was amongst the number, and was as voluble as wine could make such a reticent man. Bertoldi was drunk and broke a glass. Wine did not make him the less good-natured, he was perfectly aware of the condition he was in, and deplored it. He was so drunk he couldn't walk home, and slept all night on somebody's doorstep. Rosina—who had been selling him wine—said it was disgraceful.

It was very late when we stopped dancing. As usual it was the players who first left the room. They walked down the steps and played a farewell tune down in the road.

The village was hushed, the murra players had gone to bed, and the full moon, high in the heavens, shed its clear light into the narrow

street. The white houses stood luminous among mysterious dark shadows.

The players walked up the street, but at the fountain they stopped, and standing in the magic light in the middle of the crossing, they began to play again . . . one tune after the other.

We stood listening by the wall. No one spoke a word. It was indescribably beautiful, the string instruments, the moon and the phantom musicians whose black clothes were indistinguishable against the shadows behind.

They stood playing for a long time.

At last Giacomi stopped and said, 'It is enough.'

'Bravi, bravi,' we called; 'bravi, bravi,' came from the dark shadows round about, which suddenly became alive with people.

'Good-night,' we called out to each other, although it was too dark to distinguish any one. 'Good-night,' they called back, 'good-night,' and we went home.

CHAPTER XI

THE MOUNTAIN

It was Rosina's idea that I should stay in one of the mountain huts. The sun was getting very hot and up on the mountain it would be cool and fresh, even in August. Many of the peasants had huts up there which were used in haytime, and I hoped to stay in one of these.

At first Rosina suggested the hut rented by Bortolo, but it had only one room and he would be wanting to use it. Most of the huts had only one room. There was, however, one said to contain four rooms, which belonged to Di Marchesi Filip, who drove the oxen wagon. So I went to ask Filip if he would agree to my staying there.

I found him stretched at full length on a wagon in the shed, asleep. The shed opened on to the street, nearly opposite to the tunnel leading to Nino's house. Filip's front door was always locked, so that to get into the house one had to pass through the dark shed to a gallery, which ran round two sides of a courtyard reeking of manure. The kitchen door and window opened on to the gallery, and a door at the corner led into the big house where the bedrooms were. Filip and Gioan each occupied a separate bedroom, whilst Marget and her daughter shared a third. The rooms in use were large and airy, with windows opening on to the piazza, but the rest of the house was in a tumbledown condition. Filip never mended anything. His married

sons, however, had more energy. At Christmas, Stefen had put new panes in the broken windows to please his mother, and at Easter, Giacom had whitewashed the big fireplace. Gioan, who was still unmarried, was like his father, and dozed when not at his regular work.

I looked into the kitchen, but finding no one at home, I returned to the shed, where Filip was watching me with wide-open eyes.

I told him of my plan, but Filip, a man of few words, would not say much. He was, however, immensely tickled at the idea, which he thought crazy. Not that he said so. What he said was that he'd think about it, and that he'd talk it over with his sons, and his sleepy eyes twinkled. Having uttered that much, he settled down for another forty winks, and I went out into the sunny street.

By the door I met Nino, his hat covered with the sulphur he had been dusting on the vines.

'Filip says he is going to talk it over with his sons,' I informed him, not feeling very hopeful of the result.

'That will be all right,' Nino seemed to think. 'I will talk to Giacom myself—he's my wife's brother-in-law, and Gioan is a man with a kind heart. And I hardly think Stefen will mind,' he went on reassuringly. Then pulling a post card from his trouser pocket he said: 'From Gaetano. Raimondo has arrived. He had a stormy passage—just think, instead of fifteen days he was twenty-three days on the water! Gaetano, who thought he could not have sailed by that boat, had given up all hope of seeing him. Then quite unexpectedly Raimondo walked into the room. They were so delighted to have him back again that they could not leave off hugging him for joy.'

'Then I suppose Angelina has a letter?'

'She has not, signora, and she is very angry. But it won't hurt her to suffer a little—she ill-used Raimondo—now it is her turn.' He was very stern, then softening a little, he added: 'I told her that post cards always come quicker than letters, and no doubt she will hear to-morrow or the next day. . . . What upset her was to hear that Bigi had received a post card to-day from Raimondo himself.'

On my way home I met Angelina coming up from town. Doubtless she had been to the post.

'Any news of Raimondo?' I asked.

'No, signora, he has sent a card to Bigi . . . and Nino has heard from Gaetano that he has arrived . . . but for *me* there is *nothing*. If I do not get a letter,' she went on in great agitation, 'if I do not get a letter by first post to-morrow, then I will *never* speak to Raimondo again . . . never . . . after all his promises . . . !'

She was beyond reason, so I left her to her sorrows, and sorrow she did for next day brought no letter. She spent the time alternately sobbing and raging, I don't know which was the most trying. However, to the relief of everybody, except her mother, who had been saying, 'I told you so,' Raimondo's letter came the following day, and Angelina so far recovered as to answer it by return of post.

I waited patiently for Filip to make up his mind about the hut, but he didn't. He was not a man to be hurried, nor was he open to argument or persuasion. I knew that. With Filip one had to wait, so I waited. When I could wait no longer I tried to bring him to a decision by an indirect attack. To the person I thought most likely to repeat it to him—it was Giacomina—I said: 'Filip does not

want me to come; no doubt he thinks that if I don't want to be baked in the sun, I had better go back to England, where I belong, and not bother people round about here.'

It reached Filip's ears and had the desired effect. He made up his mind. The news spread through the village, and was shouted to me by every friend in sight as I came down the street.

I found Filip stretched on the maize meal chest in the kitchen, dozing, and his wife Marget on the hearth-stone vigorously knitting. Filip was a splendid majestic old man over six feet high, with white hair and dark tanned skin. His movements were leisurely and dignified. He raised himself on one elbow as I came in and pulled his felt hat down over his eyes.

He and his sons, he said, would have no objection to my being in the hut—I could have the little bedroom and share the kitchen, and he would provide the firewood. But . . . he was quite sure I wouldn't like it, it was a rough mountain hut . . . it was brutta.

'And what about the price?'

'Ah.' Filip shrugged his shoulders and subsided on the chest. Marget knitted quickly and her mouth was firm. She was a wiry little old woman, with bright brown eyes.

At last, when the silence became oppressive, she said: 'The signora can give what she considers adequate.'

'You'd better see first how you like it,' said Filip wisely, certain that I wouldn't.

Then we talked of the weather.

.

A few days later I explored the mountain with Nino as guide. He had offered to show me all over it as a sort of return for the

money I had given him. I was very glad of a guide, and particularly of his company, for he had something interesting to tell of everything. For a man who had had little education and rarely attempted to read a newspaper, he was singularly well informed. He always had an answer to my questions, and it was seldom he would hold up his hands in dismay, saying: 'But the signora always asks "why!"'

It was noticeable that the villagers were very careful of what they said of their neighbours, and Nino was no exception to this rule. It is true that Rosina would gossip, but she never mentioned the more serious scandals. If I asked Nino to clear up one of these mysteries, he would look away and say he 'didn't know.' Of course he knew. I rather admired this reticence on his part, for he was a very talkative man. I do not think I would have found out much if it hadn't been for Marget. She told me about everything. On dark evenings when we were alone together in the mountain hut, Marget would divulge these secrets. With evident enjoyment she related all the scandals of the last sixty years, until I thought Campià the most wicked place, but the most adorable.

It may not have been a coincidence that neither Rosina nor Marget were born and bred in Campià. Marget was from the Trentino, Rosina from a distant townlet where tourists stay. Perhaps in those places tongues were looser.

On every other topic than his neighbours Nino was very talkative. Altogether we were nine hours on the mountain, and conversation never flagged nor fell flat. He told me a great deal about the trees and their various uses and names, and pointed out those he had seen growing in California, and those which he had only seen from the train when crossing the American continent. He also attempted to

describe some of the strange plants he had seen abroad, hoping that I might be able to tell him about them. As regards insects in general, he was less well informed, but he knew a great deal about birds, for he was a passionate sportsman. He was a very good shot, and spent hours on the mountain with his gun. Except for tame rabbits, birds were the only other kind of meat he could obtain, and if I regretted to see the little birds killed, I did not grudge Nino their flesh. Meat gives you strength, the peasants said; they had learnt that from experience, during a succession of lean years, always hoping to be rich enough to satisfy this craving. Meanwhile the little birds were killed, becoming more and more scarce. What the poor will live on when they are exterminated I do not know. But one thing is sure, insects, fly pests, grubs, and caterpillars will ravage the crops unchecked.

Campià was on the eastern side of the mountain, and our long climb brought us to the summit of the northern slopes. A few villages lay scattered in the wide valley between us and the range of hills beyond. Nino knew the villages by name. He also pointed out the snow-capped peak beyond the mountain chains, and the little white house which marked the frontier.

Near the lake on an almost inaccessible ridge, a church had been built with a road tediously zigzagging up to it.

'Why ever was it built there,' I asked, 'so far away from the village?'

'They began to build it at the foot of the hill,' Nino answered me, 'but a strange thing happened. One morning when the workmen came they were unable to find their tools. They looked for them everywhere.'

'And were they found?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'on the top of the hill. They carried the tools down and went on with the work. . . . But next morning the same thing happened, and the day after again. At last they understood that it was a sign from the Madonna, that she wished the church to be built on the top of the ridge. . . . So that is why it was done.' Then, glancing quickly at me, he added, 'You don't believe it.'

'And you?' I asked.

'I suppose so,' he answered, and walked on. After a bit he stopped. 'You see,' he said, half turning, 'all these things happened so long ago. We must either believe what we are told—or else believe nothing. . . .'

We walked on, and taking a path leading into a valley of the mountain, left the view behind us. We passed two little huts shut up and locked, and a pink villa higher on the slope which belonged to the signor's mother-in-law. We crossed the valley, ascending the opposite side, which was higher and steeper. Far up it was another white stucco hut.

'Cornighe,' said Nino, pointing to it. Seeing that I was not sufficiently interested, he added, 'That is Filip's hut, it is called Cornighe.'

We clambered up with renewed energy. The hut glowed in the sunshine, with dark bushes on the rising ground behind it. It was quite a big cottage, and in such a splendid situation.

We walked round to the door. It was locked.

Nino shouted for Marget, but no Marget answered. It had been arranged that she should be there to show me over the hut. We

listened in vain for the tinkle of goat bells. Nino shouted again, and walking down a path, shouted, a little way off, but no Marget answered. We concluded that she must have gone off to find her sheep, which might be anywhere on the mountain.

So we hunted for the key amongst the stones by the door, and were rewarded by finding it. Feeling very bold, we opened the door and went in.

We came into a dear little kitchen, neat and tidy. It was simply furnished and lacked nothing that peasants would need. There was a table and some stools, a copper cauldron, a frying pan, and a board for polenta. On the wall hung a large wooden spoon and a strainer, and from the rafters of the ceiling hung several hoops of wood, on which small sacks of flour could be put out of reach of mice. A wooden tray for cream cheeses was suspended near the window. The floor was paved with uneven flagstones and, of course, there was a glorious big fireplace with a raised hearthstone.

The adjoining room was used as larder and a storeroom for wooden rakes. By the doorway, on a board placed on the earth, stood the two copper water pails.

Upstairs were also two rooms. A large one over the kitchen, a smaller over the larder. The smaller room was divided from the stairway by a rough plank partition which gaped at the seams. Neither of the bedrooms possessed a door. The windows were closed with wooden shutters, there being neither window frames nor glass upstairs. Roughly made bedsteads with hard, haystuffed mattresses, were the only furniture.

It was not at all as brutta as Filip had made out. It was primitive and perhaps not up to hotel standard, but it was clean. I knew I

would be very happy there; in fact, I knew I should be very unhappy if I did not stay there.

The view was lovely and it was quiet and peaceful.

Nino followed me from room to room, but hardly spoke. I think he was uneasily turning over in his mind what Marget would say should she come and find us inside the hut. Marget was not fond of Nino.

We went downstairs and out into the sunlight. Nino gave a sigh of relief as he stepped outside and turned the key, casting a wary eye round. Then we sat down by the door and ate our lunch.

In front, sloping gently down, was a grassy ridge with a deep valley on either side. At the far end of the ridge about a mile away, stood the signor's large house, with Monte Moro beyond in the background. The signor spent a few weeks in his house every summer. His wife owned a great deal of land on the mountain, which was rented by the two cattle farms.

In the valley on the left was La Pallina, the hut Nino would occupy when he came to help Faustino cut the signor's hay. On the other side were the crags, which from below looked like the top of the mountain. But there was a great hollow between them and the summit.

Having finished eating, Nino picked up his basket and stood up. Then he called 'Marget.'

'It is no good,' he said, after a while, 'she may not be back until sundown. Perhaps if we go on we shall find her on the mountain.'

I followed him along a little path which curved and brought us to an old hut close by. The Di Marchesi's used it as a barn, but before Cornighe had been built, it had been their mountain hut.

At the side of it the precious rain-water tank had been built. Water was very scarce on the mountain.

We left the path and zigzagged up the slope, until we reached an artificial rain-water pond where the cattle drank. Along the edges of the pond, in the shallow water warmed by the sun, were thousands of tadpoles. With great commotion they wriggled out into the depths as we approached.

Nino had never heard that tadpoles grow into frogs. He was astonished when I insisted it was a fact. We caught a lot of tadpoles for him to look at and compare.

'It is quite true,' I said, looking at his doubtful face.

'I believe it, because it is you that tell me so,' he said politely, 'but I've never heard of it before. I've passed this pond hundreds of times at all seasons of the year, but I've never seen it when it wasn't full of tadpoles. I thought they were always there.'

We took the cattle track up the cleft between small bushes and blocks of gray stone and came out on the wide grassy slopes broken and traversed by endless cattle tracks. We were now at the back of the mountain, so to say, that is, on the western side. The wide valley which we had seen from the northern slopes continued right round the mountain, which stood free and independent. We were higher than the nearer mountains, and could see for miles across ragged mountain chains. There was a wonderful feeling of space.

I stood enjoying the view and the wind, whilst Nino gazed at the grassy slopes and swore under his breath.

'It gets worse every year,' he said sadly. 'Ostia. When the cattle tread on the steep slopes their hoofs tear the turf and spoil the surface, and the rain washes the earth away, and in the end the

mountain will be nothing but a desert of sand and stone. Soon no grass will grow here at all.' He kicked a stone savagely along. 'Do you see those terraces over there? People used to grow wheat there —now cattle graze there, ostia, and look at the way they spoil it.'

It was only too evident. The whole surface was cut up and seamed, and loose stones had rolled from bare places above down on to the grass. The cowmen had been collecting some of them into heaps.

The cattle farm was a large stone building, standing on the grass without as much as a tree to shelter it. The cows were on the slopes above us out of sight, but we could hear the bells tinkling. A number of black pigs roamed near the farm, and two wild-looking dogs barked furiously, much to Nino's discomfort. He had had unpleasant experiences of dogs. We braved them, however, and picked our way through indescribable mire to the stairway, where an old man had come out to see what the dogs were excited about. We mounted the stairs and came into the kitchen, where the old man gave us as much milk as we could drink, and only one glass to drink it out of. Nino, therefore, would not touch a drop until he was quite satisfied that I had done with the glass for good. He gave the old man all the cherries he had brought up in his basket, and in return was given a couple of odd looking cheeses, called poina, which were hanging up in cloths by the fireplace, blackened with smoke.

Out of the kitchen, where the men slept in bunks, opened the dairy, and beyond it a room full of cheeses. It was an airy place, slits having been left in the stonework so that the wind could blow right through.

Nino had a lot to say to the cowman, and was very reluctant to

leave, none the less he had to tear himself away, for we still had far to go. I think he had taken me the longest way round he could think of, in order to see if I were a good walker or not.

Bidding farewell to the old cowman we walked on and on across the grass, past places where wild peonies grew, right up to the beech-trees. The trees were large, with thick dark foliage. Among the roots were pale gray rocks and loose stones. We walked carefully in the cool shade. Nino had said something about adders.

This was the real summit, but there was no view amongst the trees. We came to a rocky slope and began to scramble down amongst thick bushes and prickly wild rose plants.

Nino hesitated, he had missed the path, and was wondering how I would take such negligence on his part. Remembering suddenly that I was of the upper class, and at liberty to abuse him, he half expected me to make use of my privilege. With the expression of a child expecting to be punished he looked round at me, and confessed with humble dignity that he had lost the path.

It was on an occasion like this that a look or a tone of voice would reveal more of the relations between signori and peasant than volumes of words.

Nino expected me to be angry. But why should I be? Weren't we friends? A few minutes' walk the way we had come would take us back to the path we had strayed from—and at the bottom of the slope where we stood we could see another path which led to the very place we were aiming for. It would not be far to scramble down. . . .

Nino, waited, gazing at the view.

'Let's be getting on,' I suggested.

'You arn't angry ?' he asked in surprise, turning to look searchingly at me.

'Why should I be?' I answered. 'I rather enjoy scrambling about.'

'Ostia,' he remarked, forgetting that a lady should not be hearing such a word. 'Then you don't mind?'

'No.' I shook my head.

He led the way, and I followed as best I could over stones and through bushes. Once we got into such a tangle of undergrowth that we were forced to retrace our steps. At last we reached the path below, which took us up round the hollow right up to the crags.

Here was the view. A few smaller heights, a sheet of water, and the Lombardy Plains beyond, merging into the hazy sky so that it was impossible to distinguish where the one began and the other left off. We could see Campià and San Lorenzo and the town and the lake 5000 feet below us. Scattered on the hills behind the town were a few farm-houses, of which we could only see the tiled roofs.

Then we found a bit of shade and rested and ate dinner. Nino recounted some of his adventures in California, and told me how hard it was that his countrymen have such a bad reputation.

'It is the fault of the people in Lower Italy,' he said, lying at full length on the grass and gazing up into the sky. 'They are thieves, and stick knives into each other—we are quite different up here in the north, but no one will believe we are honest in America. No farmer will let us sleep a night in his barn, even when we offer to pay. The word 'Italians' is enough for him. So if we have to tramp we nearly starve, and suffer terribly if it is cold. Sometimes, however, even a bad reputation is an advantage. You

know I was in California with Bortolo—well, some of the men there were making fun of him, he is far too good-natured, and I was standing near by with a pick in my hand. It was shameful the way they went on with Bortolo. I got angry, and looking at them like this—with the pick in my hand—I swore at them in Italian. . . . Those three big men were so frightened they took to their heels and fled. I *was* surprised. They must have thought I was about to murder the lot of them! The Italians of Lower Italy are very hot-blooded,' he explained, 'they get half mad and do that sort of thing. Nobody seems to know that there are decent people in Italy, ostia. But it was rather funny. That same evening I was the most popular man in the place. The three Americans I had so frightened took me to the saloon and stood me as many drinks as I wanted. And every one else was so kind, they didn't know how to be friendly enough. All because they thought I was a terribly dangerous fellow. Very much the same thing happened when I was in Austria——'

'Whatever did you go to Austria for?' I asked.

'For money, of course, for palanche—they give better wages than here, but I only stayed a fortnight. There were several of us Italians working for that man, as well as a number of Austrians. The boss came one evening, just as we were going home, and wanted something done to a cart which stood loaded. Seeing us Italians standing there together, he called to us in German, telling us what to do, but we could not understand him. Instead of calling the other workmen, who were all there and could have done it just as well, or given a hand to show us what he meant—he began making fun of our ignorance, and they all grinned. It was more than I could stand. Clenching my fists and coming a step forward, I shouted at him:

"Goddam, son of a bitch!" He turned quite pale and walked quickly away, continually looking over his shoulder to see if I were following. Next day, as I couldn't go back to work there—I came home.'

'I should run away too, if you looked at me with flashing black eyes like that,' I said; 'we are not used to that sort of thing in England either. I wonder what you look like when you are *really* angry.'

'But I am never *really* angry,' he answered.

'In England we also have the idea that Italians are cut-throats and robbers——'

'But not in these parts.'

'Perhaps not—but we don't trouble to discriminate. As long as you wear a black slouch hat, and have glittering black eyes and a hand-bill at your belt, how can you expect us to think you are anything but a brigand? Now I wonder whether you would throw me down one of these precipices for the sake of the money in my purse.'

'But, signora,' he cried, sitting bolt upright, 'not for a thousand lire would I do such a thing!'

'But you don't know how much is in my purse,' I objected.

'No?'

'Four lire and a half, I think,' was what I answered.

'It would make no difference if it were four or four thousand lire,' he said; 'besides, we have been seen up here together, and if anything happened, I would be called to account. Come on,' he said, getting up, 'I want to show you that place where the man fell down and was killed last year.'

We looked down the dreadful place and shuddered, and passed

on to where the peasants sometimes sit and sing on summer evenings. When Nino's mother was living they often sang there. She had a beautiful voice, and so had others who were now either dead or in America. The singing could be heard right down in the town, and the people would come out and applaud.

We crossed the valley and came up to the signor's house. We rested on his garden seat. Nino felt very daring to do this. The seat was in one of those places where there is always a breeze. I soon got to know and enjoy those windy spots, they were quite local; a few yards off, the air would be still and breathless.

On the green in front of the house was the signor's private chapel, a minute place with an altar. There was just room for the priest inside, the congregation had to kneel out on the turf. It was hardly ever used.

We walked ruthlessly over the grass to a pathway. Nino, who had not been up the mountain for some time, was dismayed at the sight of the grass. The dry weather had parched it and there would be very little hay. It was hardly worth mowing in parts. He was upset about it, although he had no lands there nor hay belonging to him. The path brought us to La Pallina and the direct road down to Campià.

We never found Marget.

.

I was now more than ever determined to stay on the mountain. Filip, however, was a difficult man to deal with, he wouldn't say how soon I might come nor what his terms were. The Di Marchesis were proud people and would not ask anything but a fair price. It would, however, be quite different if I made a liberal offer. They

could then tell their neighbours, with a shrug, that it was I who had decided the price—as for them, they would have been content with half or even a quarter. . . .

In the end I asked Rosina to settle the matter for me, and she paid Filip a visit, arranging everything in her admirable way, after having picturesquely told Filip that I had threatened to beat her if she did not bring matters to a head. She did not, however, forget his interests, and suggested the highest price that she thought it likely I would give, fifteen lire the month.

I was to have the smaller bedroom, use of the kitchen, fire-wood, and a supply of water fetched from the tank. On my behalf Rosina asked for crockery, a chair and table for the bedroom, and a bowl to wash in; also a heap of fresh hay for our beds and a curtain for the bedroom doorway. Marget offered to wash up my dishes for a consideration—left entirely to my liberality, and stipulated that I should on no account ever fetch water from the tank, as they were particular about the water which was used for drinking!

It was all agreed upon, and that day week was fixed for me to move in.

CHAPTER XII

CORNIGHE

THE following Wednesday afternoon Angelina fetched us at San Lorenzo with a donkey. One load of things had already been taken up the mountain in the morning, now we loaded the remainder on the donkey, and put my little girl on top.

In the village Marget joined us with two goats. She carried a large uncovered basket on her arm, in which were six hens that didn't like it. She had on a clean dress and apron, and on her head she wore a man's old felt hat, which hid most of her white hair. Her bright brown eyes were full of humour.

We walked slowly up the mountain road.

Donkeys are odd creatures. This one, although quite willing to go, would only go slowly. Also, instead of walking along the road like human beings do, it picked its own way. It followed a sometimes invisible, sometimes very worn track, which crossed and recrossed the road a few hundred times. Sometimes it would follow the road for a few yards then cross it suddenly at right angles. The donkey must have walked six times as far as we did. After some experience I gave it a wide berth. If in front one was liable to be run into or bitten, if behind, one's toes suffered if it suddenly turned, and I was warned that it kicked. It was never beaten nor hit, but Angelina's voice continually and energetically urged it on.

'Ü, ü—num—ü, va là,' she shouted, and Marget would join in when she wasn't occupied with the goats. These two animals ran loose and were continually disappearing in the bushes or lagging behind.

'Le,' called Marget, and the donkey stopped instantly. 'Tä, tä, cicci tä,' she cried, coaxing the goats, 'tä, tä.' They tinkled out from some bushes on the road ahead of us.

'Num, ü, num.' Angelina started the donkey again, and we dawdled on. One of the hens in Marget's basket, which had been restive for some time, made a dash for freedom. It gave a wild cackle and flapped its wings. Without any hesitation Marget slapped it on the head and the bewildered creature became quiet and thoughtful for some minutes.

The road was worse and steepest at the lower part, and it was an effort to get up at all. On one side were rough rocks and small bushes, on the other the ground went down steeply. I wondered how the oxen wagon could go up it at all, and still more, how ever it got down. At the top of this stony steep part the road turned, and there were a few level yards before it divided. Here we sat and rested. Marget put the basket down, and the donkey went on, nibbling.

Before five minutes had passed, Marget was on her feet again.

'Num,' she said. It means 'let us go' as well as 'go on.' She seized the basket, slapped the rebellious hens, and pursued the donkey.

We took the left path, it went zigzagging up. There were thick bushes on either side, but rocks were always in evidence. At one of the bends we saw Francesca, who was Marget's eldest daughter. She and Stefen were twins. Francesca stood among the bushes

with a broad-brimmed straw hat on her head, looking extraordinarily handsome. Her three little boys scampered to cover, and we could hear Giacomi, her husband, talking, although he was hidden from view. He and Girolomo were rigging up a wire for the transport of wood. The bundles slid down the wire to a place near the road.

We went on, but were again delayed. The goats had gone off, and became mixed up with Francesca's. Each called to their goats, and it was some time before the refractory beasts would come. The elderly brown goat should have known better, the black one was a mad young thing, full of mischief. At last they came bounding up the road.

'Num,' said Marget, and we went on. The road went up and up and up, and the donkey would not hurry. Finally we reached a grassy space with tall trees and a spring of water, where the donkey drank. We all sat down and rested, as one must do at this place unless one wishes to be unlucky, at least so I have been told over and over again.

The road divided again, and we took the right-hand path, which seemed to run nearly parallel to the one we had come by, but it mounted higher and higher. I would not have felt so tired if the donkey hadn't compelled us to dawdle. By the roadside an emerald green lizard dodged under the grass.

'Num, num, ü.' The donkey wouldn't hurry—it never did; it never had.

On we went, and there was a deep gorge on our right. So steep was the slope that the owner had left a fringe of trees along the roadway, so that if an oxen-wagon overturned something would stop it

from rolling to the bottom. The road was so bad that accidents were not exceptional. Then at last we came to La Pallina.

'Cornighe,' said Marget, pointing to the little house which seemed far off.

At La Pallina the mountain changed. No more rocks nor boulders came up to the surface, the ground was smooth and grassy, the slopes rounded but steep. Earthy paths, muddy in places, branched off in different directions and were lost in the grass. It was like a great park. No fence nor hedge divided up the various properties. The trees were different too. There were rowan and beech-trees, silver birches and hazel bushes. Wild roses were in flower, and amongst the grass we found wild strawberries. Bell heather grew in places, and cranberry and bilberry plants. We struck for the ridge and reached the crest half-way between Cornighe and the signor's house.

It was evening, about six o'clock, and the sun was already out of sight behind the mountain. I would have liked to stop to enjoy the view, but there was no time to linger. Angelina had already reached the hut and was looking for the key.

I went up to our little bedroom. It looked bare and empty. There was nothing in it but a chair and a little rickety table with a flaming red cloth on it. Angelina came upstairs with a large sackful of fresh hay which she shook out on the floor, then went away to get more. Then she brought up my other things, and whilst I unpacked Marget milked the brown goat in the kitchen. I unrolled our Willesden canvas sleeping bags and put the little one to bed. She was delighted with the hay and said she never wanted to sleep in a silly old bed again.

I fetched her up a bowl of goat's milk. There were no cups, the

peasants never used them, but Marget had provided me with a few plates, the first ones she had ever possessed, I think. The Di Marchesis always used bowls for everything.

I made my evening soup and sat with Marget by the blazing fire, for it was a chill evening. Angelina had gone back to Campià to restore the donkey to its owner, and would not be back before the morrow.

.

When Angelina returned to Cornighe she brought a kitten with her, a dear little gray and white pussy. It was very playful, and we watched it with amusement catching flies. It would jump into the air and catch a fly in its mouth, or bound across the floor and pin its quarry down with a paw. I never saw a little kitten so clever or so sure. Few flies escaped her. Whether it was hunger that drove her to do this, I do not know; Marget suggested that it was lack of animal food. She fed the kitten on polenta and soup, for she could hardly spare the meat she could ill afford herself. Poor little Mini didn't like polenta, and was always hoping to be given something else. When we sat down for a meal she would prowl round the table and yowl until we gave her something, and having eaten it would yowl again.

One morning when Mini's yowls were particularly persistent, Marget lost her temper. I was just about to slop some more milk on the floor for the kitten to lick up, when Marget picked up a long switch and gave the kitten a savage cut with it. Mini gave a wild yell, bounded out of doors, and rushed up the nearest tree.

My little girl was indignant at the cruelty of it; she burst into tears and, without a word, left her breakfast and ran upstairs to cry loudly on the bed.

It was nearly more than Marget could bear. Had I remonstrated with her, she could have defended her action. But these tears—this wordless rebuke! She loved the little girl, and would never willingly have brought tears to her eyes. It had never occurred to her that she would mind such a thing. . . .

I ate my breakfast in silence, listening to the pitiful sobs upstairs. Marget said nothing. At last the little girl came down with a red, tear-streaked face. Stopping in the middle of the kitchen she said, with all the determination she could muster:—

'Marget—if you do that again, I will go upstairs and cry for a whole half-hour!'

No threat could have been more effective. Marget covered with shame, went out of doors.

.

Life on the mountain was very different from life at San Lorenzo. There was no coming and going of people, no hurry nor bustle. The Di Marchesis never shouted, but were quiet industrious people. They had never had anything to do with tourists or foreigners, and Giacom was the only one of them who could talk passable Italian. Compared with them, Rosina seemed cosmopolitan. Her aim was to make money. What was money to the Di Marchesis? . . . To overcharge they condemned as robbery. They despised Rosina, they despised Nino, they despised most people, and they had enormous faith in themselves.

I never discovered where the Di Marchesis originally came from. They had been in the village for at least five generations. Their name suggested an aristocratic origin, and their courtly ways and exclusiveness the nobility.

They were very kind to me, but I soon discovered that I must in no way interfere with their habits. Without a word they would remove my dinner off the fire if they wanted to cook theirs—a thing Bortolo would have apologised half an hour for doing. It was difficult for me to fit things in, for they were very unpunctual. They had dinner at any time between eleven and twelve-thirty. In other ways they never interfered with me at all, and I don't think I ever lived with people who got less in my way. At times, when the weather was bad, we were thrown very much together, and were quite a little party in the kitchen. There was Marget, Angelina, the two sons Gioan and Giacom, and the latter's red-haired wife.

Giacom had inherited some of the energy of his mother, and was a handy man, never idle. He had something attractively boyish about him which made up for his horrible self-righteousness. He lived according to 'rules and regulations,' and it was a waste that he was not in the police force, as he longed to be, looking after the morals of others. Giacom's 'rules and regulations' had never been shaken, he was as full of good intentions as the leaf one turns over every New Year. He did not believe in impulses or temptations or instincts, or anything not ruled by cool reason. How he despised Nino, that sinful mortal—he hadn't much to say to him. But he never had the temptations of Nino. Emotional, sensitive, and with a keen appreciation of beauty, Nino had not always been the master of his impulses. Life had been very real to him, full of disappointment and bad luck, and the starvation which had left that odd frail look. Had he been weak he would have gone to the bad long ago, but trouble had made him thoughtful and a little wistful. His wife adored him, wept when he was too much of a trial, but stuck up

for him always. Giacom, of course, had chosen his wife for her good qualities, and not for her looks. She was a sensible girl, excellent in every way, but absolutely uninteresting. Still, I don't think any one could have suited him better, and she had enough tact to manage him and get her own way. She and Teresina were sisters.

Marget was a splendid old woman of seventy-one, full of character. Wiry and vigorous, she could work all day and do the work of a man. She liked work, she liked heavy loads and to feel that she could carry them. She was never tired nor measured her strength, it always lasted her to the end of the day, whatever task she undertook.

Indoors she always knitted or else spun wool, in the old way, without a wheel. She knitted numbers of white sock feet, just the sole with heel and toe, which she sewed on to old tops, seldom doing any darning. No Di Marchesi ever went about with a hole in his stocking—she saw to that. When alone in the kitchen she always whistled. I think I would have loved her for that alone, for I too like to whistle, but I never knew any old woman who did. She whistled old-fashioned ballad tunes, that must have had at least fifty verses to them, but she never sang them.

None of her children were really like her. Giacom had her energy but none of them had her wit. None of them could tell a story as she could, half acting it. She could take off La Macuccia to perfection, voice and all. We would shriek with laughter round the fire of an evening, and the more we laughed the funnier she became. She was never vulgar. Her tales were such as are not usually told before an audience of both sexes, but in Campià a spade is called a spade, and no one seemed the worse for it.

Nino once said to me: 'When Marget is angry she is *ferocious*—even Filip is afraid of her then.' I had never thought that Filip would be frightened of any one, least of all her. With one of his big hands he could have crushed her. It was a case of dignity and impudence then. Whether she ever went for Filip with a broomstick, I do not know. Her tall sons she treated with the greatest respect. Gioan simply didn't answer if she asked an awkward question, so that she had grown out of the habit of asking. Quite eagerly she questioned me one day if Gioan had spoken of going to America. 'I dare not ask him,' she said, 'but I am afraid he thinks of going.'

It was on her daughter that Marget vented her ferocity. Poor Angelina had had many a beating, and she will doubtless have many more. Marget tyrannised over the poor girl, and Angelina, who had some spirit, would answer back, and she would take the blows in rebellious mood. Why might her brothers do and say things for which she would be punished? Her red-haired and excellent sister-in-law would whisper words of wisdom to her about the deportment which were the lot and restrictions of the female sex. But that didn't make Angelina's back any the less sore.

In common with several old women of Campià, Marget had very decided opinions regarding the matrimonial alliances of her children. She was absolutely against Angelina marrying Raimondo. She beat Angelina if she only heard her speaking to Raimondo, and the unfortunate girl hardly dare look at her lover. Marget didn't like him because his family wasn't of the real aristocracy of Campià, nor could he make up by wealth for lack of birth.

'What!' she said, 'Angelina marry one of those cuckoos? Didn't

you know that his father has been nicknamed Cuckoo, because he is an old fool?'

'But you have nothing against Raimondo,' I suggested.

'He is extravagant.' That is all she would say. I think the only reason she thought so was because he had given Angelina some rather nice presents, and if there was anything Marget hated it was for a peasant to go in for finery. She glanced scornfully at the jewelled side-combs, the fan with the long chain, and the little brooches which Angelina treasured.

Marget had been equally opposed to her elder daughter Francesca's marriage. A young man had been chosen whom Francesca would not look at; instead she had fallen in love with Giacomi, who played the guitar and hadn't a penny. How many broomsticks had been broken over her back I do not know, but I heard she had been much more beaten than Angelina ever had been! In the end love triumphed, Marget being only too willing to give in when it meant avoiding a scandal. For Gioan she had also selected a wife, the only daughter of the only comparatively well-to-do peasants in Campià. But Gioan didn't like the girl and wouldn't discuss it—so there was an end of that.

Tranquil-looking old Anetta was another broomstick fury. She had a strong arm and a long tongue. Cristofolo had a holy respect for her. She had successfully beaten the unwilling Maria into marrying Stefen—Marget's eldest son, who had been madly in love with her. As for Dominica she had simply run away from home to save her back.

Thus the old women of Campià tried to direct the destinies of others. I understood now the appropriateness of witches being depicted with broomsticks.

On the whole I respected the men of Campià much more than the women. They were patient and treated their wives well. They were more developed mentally and morally, more responsible and much more interesting. It is perhaps sad to reflect—at least for a woman—that this was the case, for both sexes had the same educational opportunities until the men left for military service, which made an important change in their lives. I was a little disappointed in the women; perhaps because during a short visit to France I had been much more favourably impressed by French women of the lower classes than by Frenchmen, and had formed the idea that this was a characteristic of the Latin races. But no such thing. In Campià the men easily took the first place, they had all the good looks too, and were handsomer than the women, who, although strong and well-built, had plain faces.

Some of the younger women had ideas about gentility and would not work in the fields, much to their detriment, for they paid for it with bad health. It was the more to be regretted, as there were so many lighter tasks within their strength, and the men all had more than enough to do.

Many women would do unfair things, such as sell olives behind their husband's back. The husband would bring olives home and put them in the room upstairs, and whilst he was away, his wife would go up and take a few pounds and sell them secretly in town and keep the money.

'When I married,' said Marget, 'my mother said to me—if you need any money, ask your husband for it, *but don't steal his goods.* How can a man grow rich, signora, if his wife sells his olives behind his back? There is a woman in the town who does a lot of trade

buying small quantities of olives and other things too. Filip's deaf brother's wife did that sort of thing.'

'Why doesn't his daughter marry?' I remarked. 'She's a nice looking girl.'

'I don't know,' she said, and lowering her voice added, 'She's another of them. The way that girl cheats her old father! He gives her money to buy things in the town, and she buys just a little less than he tells her to, and then keeps the odd palanche for herself. In spite of it all he prefers her to his other children, who are honest and decent.'

'Perhaps she is like her mother,' I reflected.

'In every way,' said Marget significantly. 'Lucia is another one who sells olives. She buys stuff with the money to clothe her children.'

Some one knocked loudly at the door. Marget slid her feet into her wooden-soled slippers, and clattered to open it.

Outside stood the brown goat.

'Mostro!' she cried, and looking round for the black one, exclaimed: 'and where is the other Garibaldi?—ah, there you are, faccia nera—tä, tä, tä. . . .'

No goat can resist that call.

She had her bag ready, and taking some salt out, let each goat lick some out of her hand, then wishing them to move off, she went for them with a stick. The goats scuttled off about ten yards and then turned to stare at her, impertinently chewing.

'Fiöl d'una vacca, be off with you,' she cried, 'pel del anticrist,' chuckling at her own violence as she came in.

'I suppose if you give them salt they always come back for it,

and do not stray away altogether,' I observed; 'but don't you ever find that sheep wander off?' I knew there was no fence nor wall to keep them from straying for miles and miles.

'No,' she answered, 'they never go off the mountain—but they go all over the place.'

'How do you keep them from straying on your neighbours' lands?'

'We don't,' she said, 'but as their goats stray all over our lands it doesn't matter. But, of course, if the guardie find them amongst the little bushes, we are fined.'

'And who are the guardie?' I asked.

'They come up every now and then,' she said, 'always two of them together, to see that we don't do as we shouldn't. They have to see that no trees of a certain size are felled, and to keep an eye on the charcoal-burners in consequence. Then they see that the men don't cut twigs from the bushes, which is not allowed until the autumn. There are numbers of things which are against the law. Giacom was fined last year. The guardie passed by whilst he was mowing, he had accidentally cut two twigs from a bush with his scythe. The guardie saw them. . . . The goats aren't allowed among the small bushes, because they eat the tops off and kill the plants. It is a wise law, no doubt, but who can keep the goats from wandering to such places? We do our best and call them off if we hear the bells tinkling on forbidden ground—but still——'

'And how do they manage at the cattle farm?' I asked.

'Cattle farms are exempt from that law,' she answered.

'Hasn't Giuseppe just been fined?' I asked.

'Yes—and my son Stefen too. They have been burning charcoal for a signor, who *ordered* them to cut down all the trees. The guardie

came, and finding the whole slope bare, went poking about among the stumps, and found, I don't know how many, of the forbidden size. The gentleman was heavily fined, but so were Giuseppe and Stefen; they had to pay ten lire each, the poor devils. Bird traps are also forbidden, signora, Gioan is very clever at making them.'

'Has he been fined?'

'Not yet.'

I do not think the peasants paid much attention to these laws until they had been fined. Then, as the second fine would be so much heavier, they decided to take no more risks. But I hardly believe anything short of penal servitude would stop Gioan from setting bird traps, he had a perfect passion for it. That and hunting for snails were his only diversions. Whenever it was raining, and it very often did rain, he would move off with a sack on his shoulder and return with a good supply of big snails, which Marget kept imprisoned in baskets in the larder, until they were required for a stew. Gioan could neither read nor write beyond signing his own name, and he spoke the rankest dialect. All words of doubtful pronunciation that I had collected together in my list of dialect words, were referred to him, and his pronunciation was unerring, unhampered as it was by any knowledge of the Italian language. His younger brother, Giacom, had taken great pains to learn Italian when he was serving in the carabiniere, and often amused us with his stately phrases.

The carabiniere are trained to be very cleanly, and Giacom prided himself on his cleanliness, but I had not much fault to find with most of the inhabitants of Campià. But Giacom went as far as to condemn manure heaps. He said they were disgusting. Whenever

he had been away for some time and returned home, the smell from the courtyard of his father's house always sickened him. He had sound hygienic ideas on the subject, and impressed them on me.

Some time ago, during a cholera scare, all manure heaps were ordered to be removed from the vicinity of houses, and all courtyards to be cleaned out, on pain of a large fine.

'And what happened?' I asked.

'Nothing,' answered Giacom. 'Do you think any one would take the trouble to do that? They waited for the police to come up and make an example of one or two by fining them. If that had happened the whole place would have been cleared up at once. But the police didn't come, and neither did the cholera.'

Cleanliness and dirtiness were very local in this part of Italy. Some villages, and even whole districts, were reputed to be notoriously dirty, others, perhaps only a few miles off, were clean and nice. Giacom told me the most disgusting stories of some of these notorious places, which he insisted were true. On one occasion he had firmly told the head man of a certain village that he must wash his hands before signing the papers, so dirty was he. And at another place, when he had ordered an omelette for dinner, was horrified to see the housewife beat the eggs up in the leather apron she was wearing. He would not eat the omelette, but he paid for it. . . .

.

Every evening at eight-thirty the Di Marchesis went up to bed. Giacom had put a partition up in the big bedroom where they all slept. They were so quick getting into bed that I am sure they did not take many of their clothes off, probably the women only removed their dresses, and the men their trousers. They got on to the rustling

mattresses, laid down, and never moved again. I think they must have dropped asleep almost instantly. I could hear every sound plainly in my room. They never washed in the bedroom, but hands and faces were washed downstairs before breakfast, and none of them ever sat down to a meal without first washing their hands. Marget told me that she had never washed her body—and yet she was the neatest and cleanliest old peasant woman I know.

Perhaps diet plays an important part in bodily cleanliness. The Di Marchesis ate very little meat, and they were not large eaters. They frequently changed their linen, and the beds were always clean. And if they did not wash, they had none of those pests which uncleanliness breeds. The Di Marchesis had no fleas.

They were up at three o'clock in the morning, and for breakfast ate the hotted up remainder of last night's soup. The bowls of the previous evening had been placed in a row on a table, the spoons well licked, and in the morning each claimed his bowl for the breakfast soup.

The second meal, at which polenta was eaten with chunks of cheese, was between six and seven. Dinner was at eleven-thirty, polenta again, with a scrap of meat or vegetables with olive oil poured over, or stewed fungi or snails, or, on Fridays, salt fish. There never was a pudding course, or any sweetened dish whatever.

At tea-time the polenta left over from dinner was cut in slabs and toasted on the fire tongs, which were laid across the embers. Sometimes pieces of cheese were toasted as well. For supper, soup was invariably eaten. It was made without meat or stock, but often some milk was added to it. It was thick with rice and potatoes, or Italian paste and beans.

The di Marchesis at Dinner.



Day in, day out, the peasants practically ate the same food, nor did they seem to mind nor complain of the monotony. They were never greedy about eating. Sweets and cakes they were very fond of, but such luxuries were quite beyond their means. When in season they had plenty of fruit.

Rosina always sat down to dinner at a table spread with a white cloth, and the family ate off plates and used a fork. But then Rosina thought herself better than her neighbours. Other peasants never used a cloth except on Sundays or special occasions. The Di Marchesis never sat round the table, but squatted picturesquely round the room, one on the stairs, one on the hearth-stone, Angelina always on the floor, and Giacom on the high stool. Each held a slab of polenta in one hand, and balanced a little bowl of savoury on their knees. If it was a stew they ate with a fork, otherwise fingers. Mini prowled expectantly, and was rewarded with a snack here and a snack there. She yowled to her heart's content. Marget took no further notice of it.

The cooking utensils were always scrupulously clean and the washing up was never left standing about. It was washed and rinsed and left standing to drain, a dishcloth was not used, nobody could afford one. I never had cause to complain of how my washing up was done, nor, in fact, of anything. The Di Marchesis kept their word and did everything that had been promised. There was always a sufficient supply of drinking water in the house, and there was never a shortage of firewood indoors. Of course they were economical, pitifully so. Nothing was wasted. I remembered how horrified Rosina had been when I had thoughtlessly shaken the tablecloth out of doors. She wanted the precious crumbs for the pig. Nor would she let me give bones to the dog, until she had extracted every atom

of nourishment out of them. It was not only in food that the peasants were economical. Marget possessed nothing beyond the bare necessities of life. She had two sewing needles, and only a few pins, which were kept in a pin-cushion hung up by the window. Her clothes were neat, but scarred with patches. She never pretended to be anything but a peasant, and couldn't abide manners or customs which aped the signori class. At first she refused the biscuits I offered her because they were not the kind of food for such as she. It was with the greatest difficulty I got her to taste some tea. It went against all her principles to enjoy the good things of the upper classes.

Once, when there had been a mistake about the butter, and I found I had too much, I gave half a pound to the red-haired daughter-in-law. She was delighted.

'But I must ask you, signora,' she said in an undertone, 'not to tell Marget. I am so fond of butter spread on bread, but Marget won't hear of us eating such a thing. She would be furious and accuse me of pretending to be a lady. . . . We may only use just a little for cooking. When I was in service I learnt to like bread and butter. . . . My husband is not so strict—he will not mind my eating it.'

I think that the Di Marchesis must have considered it dishonourable to set foot in my bedroom during my absence. Nothing of mine was ever touched, and it chanced that I had lost the key of my bag and had no means whatever of keeping any of my things locked. Once when I had to go down to the town I left my little girl in their care. When bedtime came they simply sent her upstairs, and let the mite undress and put herself to bed. She was only four and a half years old. None of the women went into the bedroom with her, to see what sort of a job she made of it.

CHAPTER XIII

HAYMAKERS

'THIS is the path, signora,' said Gioan, as I stood watching him mow, 'which the signor wanted us to widen.'

'Whatever for?' I asked, astonished, looking at the little track which led up the hillside.

'He wanted it widened so that two people could walk abreast. It leads to the pink villa belonging to his mother-in-law, and he wished to be able to walk from his big house to the villa on a broad path, across our lands. My father refused.'

'I see that they have widened the path farther on by the villa,' I said.

'No doubt you saw how senseless it was,' he replied. 'The earth all tumbles down into the path—every year a little more—and spoils the land for hay.'

'I am sure Filip was quite right to refuse,' I said, thankful that Cornighe was without the signor's promenade, 'but what did the signor say?'

'Before that,' said Gioan, beginning to sharpen his scythe, 'they used to come to Cornighe and buy eggs, and talk a bit with my mother. They pass by without a word of greeting now. . . . The signori want it all their own way.'

I stood watching Gioan mow with his short-bladed scythe, back-breaking work. The slope was at an angle of forty-five degrees, very uneven and broken with bushes. It was quite a fine art to mow close to the bushes without cutting the twigs, and although the grass was scanty and the slope steep, not a blade of grass was left standing.

The women raked the hay right down the slopes, and made up the cocks, in places where Filip could bring the oxen-wagon. He had come up that morning and was taking a load of hay down with him. He never slept at Cornighe. He didn't like the mountain, preferring to stay all alone at Campià.

His conversations with me were restricted to the following sentences.

'You are not tired of being here yet?'

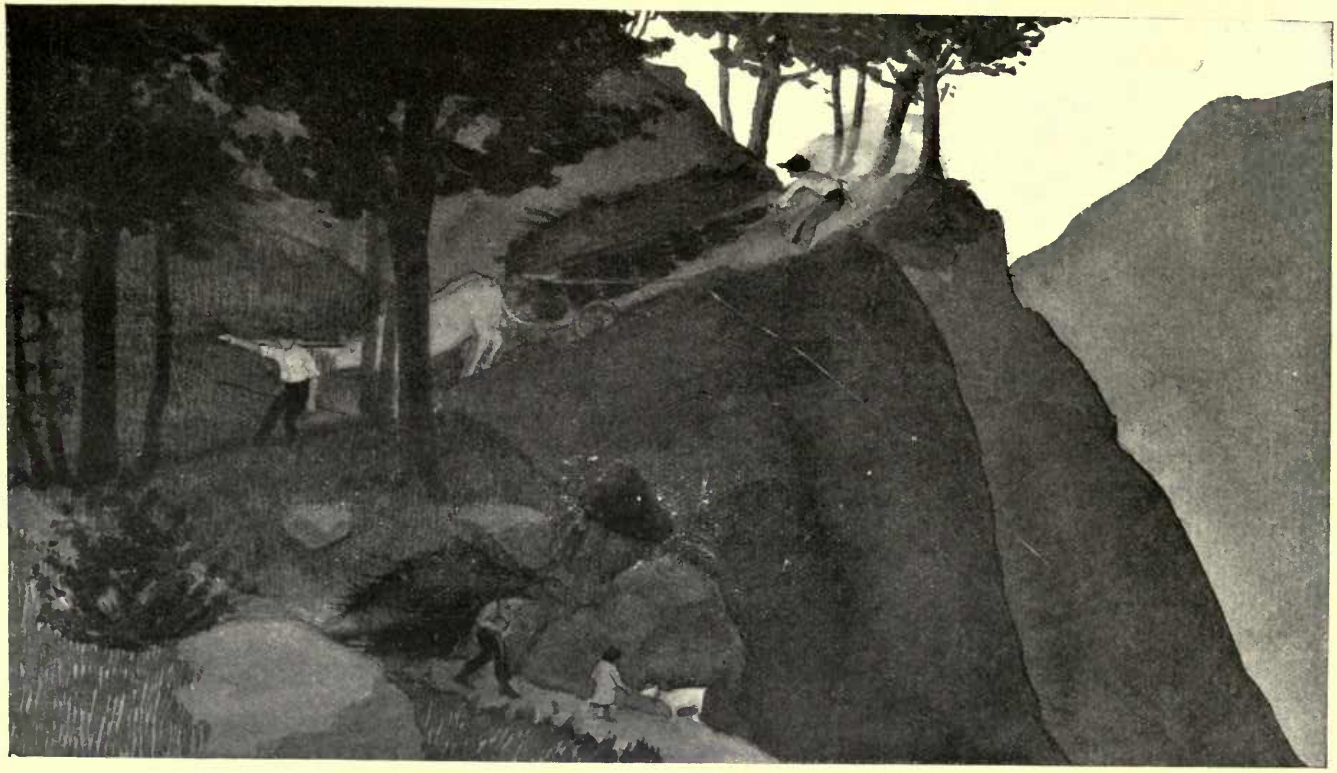
'No, no,' I would answer. 'I like being here.'

He would look at me with kindly blue eyes, as if I was an interesting but harmless freak, and pass on in his slow, dignified manner.

Gioan and Giacom loaded the hay into the wagon, and it had to be done carefully. Filip's wagon had bars on either side, and the hay would have jolted out if it had not been lined. They took leafy branches for this, cutting them off the bushes regardless of the guardie and the laws. Quite a number of boughs were needed for a load. The hay was packed down tightly, and another layer of branches were corded on over the top.

'There is no other way to get the hay down,' said Gioan, 'the guardie can say what they like. What do they make silly laws for? Do they want us to jolt the hay out on to the road—or what?'

The back wheels had been taken off and two long poles substituted,



Loads of Hay.

which dragged along and acted as a sort of brake. The white oxen were yoked to the wagon, and Filip, holding the goad in his left hand, grasped the end of the long shaft in his right. In this manner he guided the team down all the zigzags, and round all the corners.

No wonder Filip wanted to doze after one of these trips. It was a tough job to get the cart safely down. It creaked and shrieked over the uneven places, and it seemed impossible that every bit of timber in it was not split and broken. The noise it made drowned all speech. In front, Filip struggled with the jerking shaft, which kept him from falling, continually looking back to see what was happening behind. Gioan, at the back of the cart, added his weight, first here and then there, to keep it from overturning. It screeched down slopes so steep that the shaft was as high as Filip's head, leaving a cloud of dust in its wake.

Many peasants carried the hay down themselves sooner than go to the expense of hiring a cart. It was done in this way. Two poles, about six or seven feet long, were tied together so as to form a V. At the place where they were tied, a third stick, about three and a half feet long, was fastened in such a way that it stood upright, whilst the two longer poles sloped down until they touched the ground. A layer of leafy boughs was placed on the poles, and the hay packed securely on top of it. When it was ready, the peasant stooped down and raised the tied end of the poles on his shoulder, keeping it in place by the upright pole which he held in his hands. Heavy loads could be taken down like this, loads which could scarcely have been dragged on a level road. Even a young fellow like Paolino could drag a weight which it nearly broke my collar bone to lift.

Hay that year was scanty and of poor quality. The much-longed-for

rain had come too late, and not only had it rained enough to satisfy any farmer, but it had rained a great deal too much. It still rained nearly every day, and when it didn't rain it was misty. I seldom saw the distant views I longed to paint, besides, it was far too wet to sit out of doors. We walked about in mackintoshes unless the thunder kept us at home. It thundered practically every day. Not that it always affected us, the storms were often on other peaks, particularly Monte Moro, which was the highest in the neighbourhood.

At first these storms terrified me. We were so high up, so near to them, but I soon got over that. The peasants paid them no attention whatever, and assured me that the lightning never did any harm. I suppose they were right, for nothing ever happened, but the continual flashes and rumblings were alarming, especially at night.

It was the most exceptional weather. The peasants shook their heads and said they'd never seen an August like it before. Sometimes it poured for days together, and the haymakers did not get on very fast. Some would go down to Campià, others stayed on the mountain to work during the short intervals when it cleared. Gioan had plenty of opportunity to stroll about looking for snails. Giacom sat in the kitchen making wooden soles for slippers.

On Saturday evenings the peasants all went down to the village, returning to the mountain on Monday mornings. I spent an occasional week end at San Lorenzo, but usually I remained at Cornighe with Marget, who considered it her duty to stay and take care of us.

Rosina did not like me staying on the mountain, I soon understood that. When I had been there a fortnight, she thought it was time that I came back to her. And when time passed on and not a word was said of my return, she tried to force me to come back. It

had been arranged that Riccardo should come every third or fourth day with my food and post, and Rosina was supposed to send up what I had written on the list Riccardo took down to her. Rosina became very slack in sending up supplies. She forgot things. She said others were not to be had, and sent up no substitutes as had been arranged. Riccardo brought up meat which was not fit to eat. As for bread, she sent it four or five rolls short, charging me full weight, of course. I grew thin on the mountain.

It was exasperating, but what could I do? It would never do to quarrel with Rosina, who had an ever ready supply of plausible excuses.

Rosina had come to think she was quite indispensable to my existence, and she did not like this independence on my part. The Di Marchesis were not her friends. She knew they despised her, and she feared I might hear things about her, and her conscience was no doubt uneasy. She didn't know whether I had heard anything or how much. . . . She didn't know whether I had found out that she had been overcharging me. There was that matter of the twopenny eggs. She had had the face to ask Marget to sell me eggs at that price, so that she should not be exposed, saying, as an excuse, that the signora had plenty of money, and would pay. Marget had characteristically replied that she wasn't a thief.

.

Very few visitors came to Cornighe. Once a bearded gentleman passed by, who was out for the day, and sometimes relations who were visiting peasants in Campià, would spend a day on the mountain. We walked about between the showers, seeing some one at work here—some one there, and usually stopping to pass on the news. It

was almost a duty to talk to the cowmen. They had been on the mountain for nearly five months without a day off. They were all tanned with the sun, had gold rings in their ears, and friendly blue eyes.

The first time I spoke to one of them we were skirting the beech-trees of the summit. Three of the cowmen were stretched on the grass, apparently asleep, some distance below us. We passed on, but looking back I noticed one of them had got up and, walking up the slope, had crossed our path and vanished beneath the trees. I was a little surprised that he had not come near enough to hail us. But he was not so clumsy as to show his curiosity in so obvious a way.

We continued along the path under the tall trees, and, just as I had dismissed the cowman from my mind, there he was—straight ahead, walking leisurely towards us. Thus our meeting had the appearance of a charming accident.

One wet afternoon, when I was alone at Cornighe with my little girl, one of the cowmen knocked at the door, and asked whether he might come in and dry himself. I made a big blaze for him, but he was not well satisfied with it, for he helped himself freely to Marget's wood, which he piled on to the fire, talking continually the while. He had obviously had too much wine. I looked at him, a little anxiously, but his blue eyes reassured me. They were so kind and free from evil. He stood by the fire holding out his hands and telling me all about the affairs of the cattle-farm, the wet steaming from his trousers. He wore a bright blue cotton blouse, with short, rather full sleeves, gathered in a band above the elbow. He was very proud of that blouse, and began to tell me all about its good points. He

unfastened it at the throat and insisted on my feeling how thick the material was. He assured me that it was waterproof, and it was certain that no rain had penetrated it, for it was quite dry on the inner side. It was thick and closely woven, and I believe very expensive.

Having warmed himself, and feeling a little drier, he concentrated his attentions on my little girl. He took her in his arms, kissed her, and bounced her up to the ceiling and down again, and the little one, having found a friend after her own heart, shrieked with delight. She ran to the corner to fetch her doll to show him. He took the much cherished Christine tenderly in his arms, pretended she was a baby, and rocked her to sleep. The little girl danced round him in glee. Together they routed out the old cardboard box which served as Christine's cradle, and sitting down on the floor together, put her to bed. They tucked her in with the piece of paper which served as blanket, and the cowman sang a lullaby. Having assured themselves that Christine was fast asleep, they got up and had another romp. The cowman swung her round and put her on his shoulder, and held her upside down and tumbled her about. I watched without anxiety. Never have I seen a man handle a child with more care or tenderness.

It had stopped raining. The cowman picked up his staff, and made a few more remarks about the good qualities of his blouse. Then kissing the little one again, he bade us good-bye.

.

One evening, when sketching close to La Pallina, I cut my finger rather badly, so quickly gathering up my things, I went to the hut hoping to find Teresina in.

She was there, together with Battisti, preparing the evening soup, and Nino had just come in from the day's work.

I asked Teresina for some cold water, but she busied herself with other things.

'Please, Teresina,' I repeated, 'a little cold water to stop the bleeding.'

Teresina did not reply.

'Teresina,' I said, 'you have no heart.'

'Signora,' she answered seriously, 'signora, if you *demand* the water I will give it you—but you know—*it means certain death!*'

I pondered.

'What do you do,' I asked, 'when you cut yourself?'

'*Never put it into water*,' said Teresina, 'but tie it up with a clean rag, which must not be taken off until the cut is healed. I will give you a rag.'

She fetched a piece of clean linen, and set Nino to bandage my finger.

There was not much room inside the hut, which measured about eight feet by eleven. One corner was taken up by the two bunks, one above the other, sailor fashion. Great big bunks they were, as large as double beds, the bedclothes neatly arranged on the hay, and pink covers on the pillows. Nino, his wife, and child occupied the lower bunk, Marco, the signor's cowman, slept in the higher. A wide shelf, the height of a table, ran along the whole of one side, with a little window over it. The fireplace was by the door.

The signor kept several cows, which were brought to graze on the mountain during the summer months. Marco had entire charge of them. He milked them and made the butter. The signor could not have been very particular about the milk, for it was kept in pans on the wide shelf in the hut. Every sort of accident happened to that

milk. Things got dropped into it, dust fell into it and pieces of hay, in spite of Marco's care. He did his best, but how could the milk be kept clean in that tiny place, where four people slept and did their cooking?

However, there is a limit to all things, and Marco was justly incensed at Nino's behaviour the night before. Had I seen the hole in the wall, he asked, coming in with the milk pail—up there in the corner above the milk pans? Nino had done that.

'He saw a mouse there,' continued Marco, 'and taking his gun he fired at it, like a madman, in this tiny place. The plaster flew all over the place—ostia—of course into the milk!'

Nino, who had just tied my finger, said in an undertone: 'I hit the mouse.' That was all he cared about.

'A nice job I had, straining the milk and getting it clean again,' Marco went on. He didn't quite know whether to be angry or amused at Nino.

'Why does the signor keep the milk in here?' I asked.

'I should like to know why he doesn't build a proper place,' said Marco, airing his grievance. 'He has plenty of money. Besides, it might be kept in one of the rooms of the house. You can't think how difficult it is to keep it clean. . . . I don't like to eat the butter myself!'

'Oh, they are fine people,' said Nino scornfully, 'they go to bed at midnight, and don't have breakfast until it's other folk's dinner-time. Then they do nothing until it's their own dinner-time—after which they sleep for two hours. Then—sometimes—they take a promenade, after which fatigue they rest again.'

'What is the signor's profession?'

'He's an engineer,' answered Marco, 'but it is his wife who has the money.'

He had just strained the new milk through a magnificent aluminium strainer, and ladling some into a glass offered it to me.

'It is quite clean, signora,' he reassured me, with a smile. 'But I must tell you what the signor did yesterday,' he went on, sitting down on a box. 'One of his big sausages had gone bad and wasn't fit to eat. So after breakfast he brought it out and made me a present of it with great condescension. I knew it was bad, and didn't want the thing. "Thank you, signor," I said, "it will do nicely for the dog." . . . Surely, signora, if it is not fit for him to eat, it is not fit for me either?'

'The signori think anything is good enough for *us*,' exclaimed Nino bitterly.

'But what did the signor say when you answered him like that?' I asked.

'He said nothing, signora, but he drew himself up like this—and marched off.'

'If the Italian signori were like you,' said Nino, who was washing his hands in a corner, 'things would be different. You are three times more of a lady than all the signori put together, and six times as intelligent. Do you think they ever speak to us as you do?'

'But they aren't all like the signor up there,' I protested.

'There are a few who are kind-hearted, I know,' he answered, 'but all the same. . . . Do you remember yesterday, when I called you stupid because you didn't understand what I was talking about?'

'It was I who said it,' I answered, 'I said "how stupid of me not to understand."'

'Yes,' said Nino, 'and I answered, " Yes, you are stupid." I've been thinking ever since of my audacity. Do you think I would ever *dare* say such a thing to an Italian signora? I don't know what would happen if I did—I really don't!'

'You'd be lectured and kicked out,' said Marco, 'and your character would be entirely gone.'

' " The insolence of these peasants," ' began Nino, ' " here is a man who actually called a lady *stupid*—because she was . . .' "

'Put him in jail and fine him,' cried Marco gaily.

Teresina had ladled the soup into bowls, and stood wondering what was going to be said next.

'It is a good thing the signora takes it in such good part,' she said. 'Will you eat with us?'

'No, thanks, I must be going.'

'You never will have anything,' she said. 'But before you go back to England you will have dinner with us—won't you? Nino will shoot the birds, and we'll have polenta and birds—but not yet. It must be later on, when one is allowed to shoot them.'

'Why,' I said, 'you had birds for dinner yesterday. Don't deny it—I saw them myself.'

'One mustn't say such things,' she whispered.

'No, I'll send the police after you one of these days,' I retorted, 'and not only will they find the birds, but all the wine you keep up here and sell to the cowmen——'

'And I'll do it as long as the cowmen pay me for it. Won't you drink a glass before you go?' she asked, grinning all over.

'Signora,' she called after me, as I went home up the path, 'don't forget—the rag must not be taken off your finger for two or three days.'

It was nearly dark when I reached Cornighe. The Di Marchesis had just finished supper and were talking with more animation than usual.

It was all about Dominica and the signor.

Giacom explained. 'Dominica asked the signor for permission to stay in the little hut called Marmer. She wants to be on the mountain for a few weeks with her husband and her friend and Teschini, and as Marmer stands empty she thought she could stay there. He has refused.'

Marmer was a hut smaller than La Pallina, but with the most enormous bunks in it, stretching from wall to wall. Fifteen people, I am told, once slept there. It stood on the land belonging to the signor's wife, and was used by the peasants cutting the hay for the commune. For although the lands belonged to the lady, the commune had a right to the hay. Tona and his father had just finished hay-making, so the hut was unoccupied.

'But why has he refused?' I asked.

They shrugged their shoulders and implied that it was cussedness.

'The only reason I can think of,' said Giacom, 'is that three years ago, Dominica's brother—Bigi—had a misunderstanding with the signor. It was about some wood the signor said Bigi might take, and the signor afterwards denied it, and called Bigi a thief. It was only about an armful of wood. As if Bigi would steal!'

'But that has nothing to do with Dominica,' I said, 'who has not lived at home for at least eight years?'

'There is no other reason why he should refuse,' said Marget.

Giacom had taken a newspaper from the shelf and, straightening it out on the table, read aloud to us. He translated the more difficult

passages into the dialect, or else explained them to his mother. He was particularly fond of reading out paragraphs in which priests figured to their detriment. He did this, he explained, in order that the womenfolk should be shaken in their idea that a priest could do no wrong.

'There are good and bad priests,' he told me, 'and I have nothing against them as long as they leave our women alone. Ah, here's something about England'—and he read out a little paragraph about the suffragettes. It led to a number of questions, and I told them about the suffrage movement in England, especially the militants, and they listened, thrilled. Marget grew quite excited. Her sympathies were with the militants. They were ladies after her own heart. To think that women were in revolt at last! She itched to be off to London with a broomstick. Angelina's rebellious eyes glowed, and even her red-haired sister-in-law was stirred. Giacom, to my surprise, was immensely impressed. His sense of justice was evidently greater than his sense of law and order. He would willingly have given every woman a vote. He saw the cause was just and did not condemn the means.

I found the same to be the case when I had discussed the suffrage with Bortolo. He firmly believed in votes for women, and had done so long before I knew him. How different was the opinion of the signor, with whom I once chanced to have a conversation, whilst sheltering from a thunderstorm. He asked me as a favour to tell him about the suffragettes. We discussed them at great length, and when I went home, he bowed and politely told me that he still thought them unwomanly and hoped never to meet one. As for giving a woman a vote, not he!

Angelina, sitting on the floor in her usual place, was staring at the flickering lamp wick. It is all very well, she was thinking, to demand one's rights of men but how could one successfully revolt against a tyrannical mother?

Giacom, who had been unlacing his boots, took them off and put them down by his chair. Then, getting up as if he were going to bed, he stopped in the middle of the room and began to speak. He told us of what he had seen at Milan as a carabiniere, and in strong language denounced brothels, and the sort of men that frequent such places—and about the diseases. . . . It was very splendid of him to attack his own sex in that way, and what he said was just and right. But he left us womenfolk rather breathless.

'Giacom likes to talk,' said his red-haired wife, half apologetically.

But it was not only talking. Giacom had convictions and high ideals that commanded respect.

CHAPTER XIV

HAILSTONES

It had been feebly thundering all the afternoon, but this was of such daily occurrence that I paid little heed to it. It was with a look of surprise, therefore, that I greeted the Di Marchesis, who returned to the hut earlier than usual.

'There will be a storm,' said Gioan, in answer to my look of inquiry.

Angelina came in with a large bundle of firewood, followed by the red-haired woman carrying rakes. Giacom, who had hung his scythe in the rowan-tree outside, came in spattered with rain. Large drops were falling heavily. Marget was down in the stable shutting the goats and hens in. She came in, shaking the rain off her clothes, and sat down in her accustomed place on the hearthstone, but she did not take up her knitting.

The clouds looked very threatening on all sides. We waited, anxious and silent. Gioan crossed to the kitchen window and stood leaning out. Angelina went to the pantry window. Giacom and his wife went upstairs to the bedroom.

The rain stopped falling. An unexpected breeze shook the trees and died down to a breathless hush.

We waited.

Over Monte Moro was a strip of blue sky narrowing between two dark clouds. As they merged into one the storm broke with great violence high over our heads. There came flash upon flash of lightning, and the thunder crashed and murmured and crashed again. It was terrifying. On a height to the north was another thunderstorm, and a third one on Monte Moro, from which the thunder had a distinct hollow sound, as if it came from caverns, and out-boomed even our own storm.

Rain fell in torrents, and it grew dark.

Some mist blew across and hid Monte Moro, and the little strip of lake we could see, and the heights of our own mountain. Then things close by grew indistinct.

'Santo Dio,' murmured Marget, rocking herself to and fro. She never glanced at the window, but sat staring at the wall with wide open eyes. No one else spoke or moved.

Presently tiny hailstones came down with the rain, just a few at first—and then more and more. The thicker they fell the larger they grew. Down they came, hammering against the closed door and bouncing high on the grass.

We stood watching, eager for a break in the mist. We could see nothing but the flashes, and the nearest trees, and that the ground was getting white.

'Santo Dio,' murmured the old woman again.

Had the storm travelled as far as Campià? The question was in our hearts, but we dared not put it into words. If it had—it would be dreadful.

Giacom came downstairs, and opening the door, went out. The hail was still falling and bounding down the slopes. He picked up

a few of the largest hailstones. They were as large as my watch and the same shape.

The thunder kept on, and Monte Moro still boomed that fearful deep note, but the flashes grew less. The mist cleared a little, and we could see as far as the signor's house. The grass was white everywhere, and on the ground, beneath each tree and bush, lay thickly scattered the leaves which the hail had broken off. Two figures came out of the signor's house and walked across to the little chapel. They were Nino and Faustino. The village was not visible from there—it was a long walk to any of the points from which it could be seen, but perhaps it relieved their minds to go out and try to look down. . . .

The thunder died down to a whisper, rose again, stopped, rolled faintly, and then came loudly from another height, where a fresh storm had broken out. The hail stopped falling and was followed by a deluge of rain which calmed to a steady downpour. Nino and Faustino must have been drenched.

It suddenly became very cold. . . .

Angelina lit the fire, and the women prepared the evening soup. We were all very thoughtful. It was no good pretending the storm had not reached the village—we knew it must have. How much harm had it done then? Had it been as violent there or had it spent itself on the mountain? We couldn't tell, and we didn't discuss it. When we spoke it was to laugh and joke, and I could not have told what was in the minds of the Di Marchesis if I had not seen their eyes. They were bright, hard, and angry. With such eyes they joked. Then affecting indifference, they went to bed half an hour earlier than usual.

My own impulse would have been to run down to the village at once and make certain of what had happened. But none of them dreamt of doing such a thing, nor did any of the other peasants at work on the mountain. It was Thursday, and not until the usual hour on Saturday did any one go down to the village.

.

Near the signor's house I found Nino and Faustino. Nino was sitting on the grass beating his scythe with a hammer, and scarcely glanced at me.

Faustino stopped mowing.

'Si'ora!' he called, in an attitude of tearing his hair, 'draw me like this!'

'With hailstones all round you,' I called back.

He wiped his forehead and grinned.

'You saw it?' he asked, knowing I had been a little incredulous.

'Yes,' I answered, 'but I can't believe it has done so much harm when I see you laughing.'

'Would you have me cry?' Then seriously, with those hard eyes: 'Si'ora, if it has been as bad as they say, if it really has been so bad, then the storm has destroyed everything—sacramento, everything. All our work will have been for nothing—sacramento. To-morrow I go down and will see it for myself. But I tell you, Si'ora, if it is true, and everything has been ruined, then I will climb right up into the belfry, and chuck all the bells down into the piazza!'

'And the priest after them?' I suggested.

'The priest—ah, it is they that are at fault—they are wicked—lying—it is they who bring this upon us——'

'But Faustino,' I cried, remembering that quite lately he had,

by a clever manœuvre appropriated a whole lot of the signor's best hay, 'surely your sins also count?'

'How can we be good if the priest sets us such an example?' asked Faustino.

Nino, who had not yet spoken, looked up at us.

'The priest,' he said with emphasis, relapsing into his one English phrase, 'is "the son of a bitch."' He had that same hard angry look in his dark eyes which the others had had.

Teresina, followed by a goat, came and joined us. She had met Stefen on the road, and was full of the news.

'It is quite true,' she said, 'the hail came down everywhere—he said it was pretty bad at Campià itself, but was worst by the fontana and on the Ridge of Houses. At San Lorenzo it came down like hell and spoilt everything. The grapes are all on the ground, and so are the olives—and the beans.'

Nino got to his feet and laughed. Then, raising his arm above his head, he cried loudly across the hills :—

'America—America!'

We all stood and looked at him.

'How about those who cannot get away to America?' I asked.

'It is easier for others than for me,' he answered hotly, thinking of his defect. Both eyes blazed savagely. How he hated America.

'Stefen said that Bigi said,' went on Teresina, 'that it is high time all the images were taken from the church and packed on donkeys and sent away. . . .'

.

'I'd like to get some dynamite and blow up the whole rubbish heap, church and all,' said Giacom, as he sat down to supper, 'and

send the priest somewhere where he need not trouble about shaving.'

'I suppose you saw Riccardo?' I asked. The boy had been up with some things for me.

'We saw Riccardo,' said Giacom significantly.

'He was the first to bring us news of the village,' said Gioan, leaning against the wall, and staring up at the ceiling.

'He told us,' blurted out Angelina, 'that very little hail had fallen, and that at San Lorenzo the damage had been slight—insignificant.'

'Whatever put it into his head to say that?' I asked, with surprise, 'why, he told me just the opposite.'

'Riccardo is a liar,' observed Marget.

'Afterwards we saw Stefen,' said Angelina, 'and it is even worse than we feared. There has been no such storm since '81.'

'They say Bortolo is insured,' said Gioan.

'And so is Biscotti——'

'And you?' I asked.

'I?' asked Giacom, 'what would you have me insure? My trousers? The little scrap of land that *I* possess——'

He bent down to take off his boots, and went up to bed singing a song so blasphemous that the women suppressed him.

.

I saw the devastated terraces of Campià and walked down the road past the fontana to San Lorenza. Everywhere the same miserable spectacle. Half-naked vines with withered leaves scattered round about, grapes on the ground, often whole bunches of them. The edges of the torn and perforated leaves, still left on the plants, were

turning brown and every grape that had been hit by a hailstone showed its bruise. The maize plants were broken, and the long leaves hung in ribbons, as if they had been combed. All the plants had the most bedraggled appearance. In places the road was thick with olive leaves and little black olives.

All this havoc had been done in ten minutes, if, indeed, the storm had lasted as long as that, and the peasants had stood watching, utterly helpless. One old man had wrung his hands and burst into tears, the others had watched with hard eyes and firmly closed lips. Why did God send these storms? they asked, hadn't everything been done that could be done? Hadn't the Madonna been carried through the streets? It was certain that God was not at fault, it must be the church then that was responsible for this, the church and the saints and the priests. The male population of Campià swore and blasphemed with flashing eyes, and the women listened, awestruck, always ready to join in when they laughed in despair.

I felt I would not like to be in the priest's shoes at this crisis.

CHAPTER XV

BIRDS OF PASSAGE

ANGELINA and I were walking together.

'Have you heard from Raimondo again?' I asked her.

'Yes,' she replied, without enthusiasm, 'I have at last heard from Raimondo again.'

'And . . .?'

'And, signora? He has sent money to Biscotti to pay for his ticket to America!' She seemed quite angry.

'Has he already saved so much?' I asked. 'But that was very nice of him.'

'Nice?' repeated Angelina, 'yes, very nice for Biscotti, but not for me.'

'Did you want him to send you a ticket?'

'Oh, no, signora, but I have a quarrel with Biscotti. None of us have anything to do with him any more. Raimondo had quarrelled with him, but they made it up before he left. But *I* will never make it up, nor talk to Biscotti again—never. . . . Should I like it, then, that Raimondo lends him money?'

'I think it was very nice of him.'

Angelina kept her own opinion on the subject. She was not altogether satisfied with Raimondo. He did not write often enough to please her, and she was more exacting than she should have been.

The fact was Raimondo could hardly write, and to concoct a letter was a slow and inky-fingered business which one could hardly expect him to indulge in often. One quarter of what he wrote was wholly unintelligible. Bigi or Nino would sometimes bring one of his letters to me in despair, asking whether the incomprehensible words might not be the English with which he interlarded his conversation. But I was not of much help, my knowledge of American expletives being limited, and of course Raimondo spelt phonetically, according to his own pronunciation. For instance, 'gutbai' meant good-bye, and 'orait' meant all right. . . .

'I don't believe you will ever marry Raimondo,' I said to Angelina, feeling, perhaps, that it might be a good thing for Raimondo if she did not. She seemed so bent on finding fault with him.

'I shall and I shall,' she answered, 'that's certain.'

We walked on for a bit in silence.

Presently she said, pointing: 'All last summer Raimondo stayed in that little hut by the pink villa, haymaking.'

'Then I suppose you saw a good deal of him?' I asked.

'During the whole time I only spoke to him twice—my mother would not let me.'

'But you got over that?' I suggested.

'No, signora, my mother always beat me. . . .'

We stooped to gather the edible fungi growing along the path. Angelina carried them in her apron. She walked along, singing loudly, then suddenly stopped and looked at me.

'Go on,' I said.

'But, signora, I shouldn't have sung it when I was with you.'

'You know I don't mind,' I reassured her. 'Why, I'm one of the "porchi signori" myself. Go on, I want to learn the song.'

This is what Angelina sang :—

'Por paesa
El ghia en polastrel
Chei porchi di quei si'ori
I ga mangia anche quell.
Quei porchi di quei si'ori
Noi sa piö che far,
I mars i bicicletta
A forza de robar.'

(*Translation.*)

'A poor peasant
Had a chicken,
Those pigs of signori
Have eaten it as well.
Those pigs of signori,
We don't know what they are at,
They ride on bicycles
Bought with stolen wealth.'

'Now sing "Quando Sarò in America."'

'O cari giovanotti
Domani dobbiamo partire,
A costa di morire

In America voglio andar.
Quando sarò in America,
Quando sarò in America,
Quando sarò in America,
L'amante la qui sterrò.
Quando avrò qui stato,
Quando avrò qui stato,
Quando avrò qui stato,
In Italia riturnerò.
Quando sarò in Italia,
Quando sarò in Italia,
Quando sarò in Italia,
L'amante la sposerò.
Quando avrò sposato,
Quando avrò sposato,
Quando avrò sposato,
In America turnerò.'

(*Translation.*)

'Oh, dear boys and girls,
To-morrow we must part,
Rather than starve here
I must go to America.
When I am in America,
When I am in America,
When I am in America,
I leave my darling here.
After I have been there,

After I have been there,
After I have been there,
I will come back again.
When I am back in Italy,
When I am back in Italy,
When I am back in Italy,
My darling I will wed.
But after we are married,
But after we are married,
But after we are married,
I must go back to America.'

We neared Cornighe as she sang. The song had a beautiful melody. I do not know who wrote it, it sounded as old as the hills, and it must have been composed by some one who knew and loved the mountains. The whole spirit of the place was concentrated in those few bars.

.

During September the weather became worse, if that was possible, and it was almost always hazy. Very few peasants were on the mountain. The haymakers had returned to the village and were busy clearing the land of their devastated crops. Giacom and his wife were back in Campià, so was Angelina. Nino and his wife had been back some time. In a few weeks the cattle would be driven down to the valleys, and we should no longer be able to buy milk, butter, and cheese on the mountain. The signor and his wife had also departed, but the house did not stand quite empty. Marco and Faustino slept there and used the kitchen, and Marco was allowed

to put his milk-pans in the larder, now that the signor was gone.

Gioan was a great deal at Cornighe. He was unusually energetic, and a strange, adventurous light gleamed in his dark eyes. He spent hours among the bushes, selecting and cutting long, bendy sticks, which he brought into the kitchen. He trimmed and cut them the required length, sitting on a low stool, placed so that he had a good view of the path. His alert eye noticed every passer-by, and his ears did not miss a footfall. He was afraid of the guardie—because he was doing what he knew to be unlawful. He was making bird traps.

The traps were horrible, and I do not wish to describe them, nor do I know how many he set. There must have been hundreds of them. He hid them cunningly in out of the way corners amongst the bushes, sometimes baited with red rowan berries. I came across traps in all manner of places. Gioan was by no means the only one who set them.

If the guardie found any traps, they either confiscated them or else lay in wait to see who came to look after them, and then issued a summons. Bird nets were also confiscated. Not long ago Nino had spread one on his lands by the Ridge of Houses. Next morning the net was gone. No one had seen the guardie, and Nino was in two minds about its disappearance. It had been well hidden, and if it wasn't the guardie . . . who could have taken it? He blamed his enemies by turn, but gave it up as hopeless. It was just his cursed bad luck. It must have been the guardie after all. But he couldn't believe that. On the other hand, nobody had ever had a net stolen before. . . . It was a new net and a good one. Who on earth knew

he had hidden it in that place? He was very dejected about it for some time.

Once Gioan had a bad fright and came indoors greatly agitated. He had seen the guardie. They had passed down the path towards the signor's house. . . . He didn't know where they were now—if he only knew! He went to see if they were visible from the upstairs window. No. They were nowhere in sight.

There was nothing to be done but wait. Gioan kept indoors. He never went near the traps for twenty-four hours. Then, with an unconcerned air, he went stealthily among the bushes, visiting place after place. The traps were all there, and must have escaped the vigilance of the guardie.

Gioan caught very few birds. It was not a good year for anything. The harvest had been spoilt, the hay was poor, and now there was a scarcity of birds.

.

Sometimes Filip's niece passed Cornighe on her way to her father's hut, which was close to the pink villa. She was a strong, likely looking girl. She carried her basket on a stick held over the shoulder, and crowding at her heels were seven sheep and three goats, all with deep-toned tinkling bells. She called continually to the animals. When they were safely grazing round her father's hut she sat under the cherry-tree and read a novel, when she ought to have been knitting stockings. The animals were very fond of her, always nibbling and snuffling close by. She kept a staff handy to drive them off.

One evening I found her meditating over a letter.

'It is from my brother,' she explained.



Filip's Niece.

'Well, how is he getting on?' I asked, knowing that he had lately gone to serve in the army.

'He doesn't seem very happy,' she replied, 'but please read it yourself.'

I took the letter and read as follows :—

'DEAREST FATHER,—I write to tell you that I have arrived safely and am well. But father, dear, I must tell you that the life a soldier leads is dreadful. The first week they only gave us one meal a day, after that I was sent to the infantry. We sleep out of doors in our clothes and have no covers, but sleep on straw mats. Please send me more money, as I have to spend it on food, and everything is very dear.

'Your devoted son,

'LUIGI.'

'Do they only have one meal a day?' I asked in surprise, knowing that the conscripts were only paid two palanche a day.

'That is only at first,' she said, 'before it is decided which regiments they are to join. But even then they only get two meals a day—one at nine in the morning and the other at four in the afternoon.'

'He doesn't seem to like it,' I said, feeling sorry for Luigi, who was a nice quiet fellow.

'The thing is,' she said, laughing, 'that my brother has a tremendous appetite. He will like it well enough when he gets used to it.'

On my way home I passed her father. He was cutting foliage, which was dried and given to the goats and sheep during the winter. Most of the older peasants firmly believed that it should only be cut

when the moon was in a certain quarter. Marget could scarcely contain herself when Giacom callously cut it at the wrong time. . . .

This evening Marget's mouth was firmly set, and I knew at once that something had happened.

'The goats came home dry,' she announced, with an angry light in her eye. 'Some one has milked them.'

'Whoever would do such a thing?' I asked in dismay.

'I knew whereabouts the goats have been this afternoon, and I know who did it. It was Beppo down at the hut. He is a rascal.'

'But surely——'

'Yes, he did. If the goats go on his land there is nothing to prevent him doing it, he is in his right. Only . . . it isn't done. But I didn't think he was capable of such a thing. . . . What am I to make the soup of?'

She was very upset and all the more so because it was a thing which rarely, if ever, happened. The peasants did not steal from each other. Only once, in Marget's remembrance, had anything been stolen from Filip's lands. On that occasion a woman had helped herself to a basket of beans. She thought herself unobserved, but Gioan had caught sight of her and seen what she was at. Nothing was said, no one was told of it, and the Di Marchesis kept it a secret.

A few days after the goat incident, Beppo's three goats came grazing over Filip's grassland. In an unostentatious way, Gioan coaxed them back on to their owner's property. But he never dreamt of milking them, a Di Marchesis wouldn't.

.

The signor had a roccolo which Faustino was getting ready.

A roccolo is a place for catching large numbers of small birds

It is a privilege of the wealthy, because it involves a licence which is beyond the means of a peasant. All other traps are prohibited, and the peasant is only entitled to what he can shoot. But he wants the birds because he is hungry—for the signor they are a delicacy.

Without doubt roccolos ought to be forbidden altogether, for the number of migratory birds caught in this way must be enormous.

It took Faustino a long time to get the roccolo ready. The place had always been a mystery to me, and I had investigated it several times without understanding in the least what it was for. I will try to describe it.

Half-way down a sparsely wooded slope was an erection of poles. They were nearly twelve feet high, and stood in the ground about six feet apart in a double row, three feet between the rows. The poles were connected with cross poles, one at the top and one half-way down. The row was irregularly curved and very long, about forty-five yards. Wherever trees grew close enough, their boughs were tied to the poles and trained along them.

Higher up the slope stood a number of trees. Some of them were covered with leaves, but many had been chopped off a few feet from the ground. Tall, dead tree tops had been nailed and corded on to these stumps. Their dead branches were stiff and brittle. Empty tins stood on flattened places on the ground.

The rest of the slope was bare of trees. Nearly at the top stood a small square tower about twenty-five feet high. It was a rickety looking plank erection, and sticking out of the top was a long pole with a rope attached to it, looking like a fishing-rod.

One afternoon I passed close to the roccolo, and saw Faustino up a ladder at work on one of the trees. Coming closer to see what he

was doing, I was surprised to find him picking all the leaves off the tree, and dropping them on to the ground. It was a silver birch tree.

'Whatever are you doing?' I asked.

'I'm getting it ready,' he answered, looking down at me. 'It won't be long before the birds pass now on their way south.'

'But why pull the leaves off?'

'Because, signora, when the birds have flown across the mountains they are tired, and if they catch sight of these nice bare twigs, they are sure to settle on them to rest. Then, if they are thirsty they can hop about on the grass and drink from the little tins which I keep filled with water.'

'How do you catch them?' I asked.

'The net is stretched across the lower line of poles,' he answered, pointing to the erection, 'and I sit hidden in the tower. Then—at the right moment, I frighten the birds—by waving the pole to which boughs have been tied—and the birds at once fly low and down the hill—straight into the net. . . . Sometimes we catch hundreds.'

It seemed a strange occupation to pick every leaf from a tree. Several stood already naked with patches of withering foliage round them on the grass. Down by the pole erection Marco was occupied in covering the bare parts with green boughs. The ugly plank tower was to be decorated in the same way—to look like a bush. The birds were to be completely taken in.

'The first time I saw this place,' I said to Faustino, 'I walked all over it and all round it, and came to the conclusion that Italians must be crazy to make such a place. The dead trees tied to stumps particularly puzzled me.'

'You'll soon see whether Italians are crazy or not,' answered Faustino with a grin.

'I hope you won't catch any birds, that's all,' I said. 'It's horrid to snare them like that.'

'I've a perfect passion for it,' he answered, his blue eyes twinkling. I knew he was an expert at the work.

The little leaves fluttered down, and I marvelled at his patience.

Marco sauntered up.

'The signora Antonia thinks we are quite mad,' observed Faustino from the tree. 'She has never seen a roccolo.'

'Faustino's as happy as a king now the birds are coming,' answered Marco. 'He's an awful fellow,' he went on, 'for getting up in the morning. He woke me up at two o'clock to-day for breakfast.'

'I can't sleep when there's a change in the weather,' explained Faustino, picking the leaves and dropping them down.

'Oh, nonsense,' I said, 'you don't mean to say the weather is going to change? Do you really think it is going to stop raining?'

'Well, it's a fact I can't sleep when the weather changes. So it ought to change. Perhaps to-morrow.'

Marco laughed. 'Look!' he said, and we watched the low clouds blow across the summit. 'There's fine weather for you.'

'How much longer are you staying up here with the cows?' I asked Marco. He had a nervous look about him, which he had not had earlier in the summer, and he had grown thin.

'If only the signor would say!' he replied, with a sigh. 'Perhaps two weeks, perhaps three, perhaps four. How should I know?'

'Marco frets himself thin,' said Faustino.

'I know I do. It's more than I can bear to be always alone.

All day I tramp after the cows, and all day it rains. In haytime it was a bit better—then at least there was some one to talk to . . . only I was so tired in the evenings I fell asleep. I would sooner work at one of the cattle farms where there are several cowmen together —but I am always alone. Do you know, I've been up here since April, and during all these months I've not had a single day off, nor a chance of going to mass. Not even to a festival!'

'But surely the signor could have arranged for you to have a day off——'

'He hasn't,' said Marco. 'Of course, if I cared to pay some one to do the work for a day—but the signor would not like that. He'd say the cows were used to me, and must not be looked after by any one else.'

'What the signor thinks,' Faustino enlightened us, 'is that if he did allow Marco a day off he'd get so drunk he wouldn't be able to walk back.'

'Very likely,' answered Marco, and trudged off to see where the cows had strayed to.

'I'm quite anxious about Marco,' said Faustino, climbing down the swaying ladder. 'It is making him quite ill. He's been up here six months . . . and not once been to mass.' He slipped his feet into his slippers, which had been left at the foot of the ladder, and sat down beside me on the wet grass.

'Tell me, Faustino,' I asked, 'wouldn't it be possible to rent a house in Campià if I came back later on?'

'Of course it would,' he answered, 'I have a house myself which stands empty. It has four rooms and a piece of garden walled in, and if it is not let you can have it any time.'

'What would the rent be?'

'Thirty lire a year,' he answered, smiling at my astonishment. 'Had you asked my advice when you first came, I would have told you how to live very cheaply.'

'If I had asked your advice then,' I answered, 'I wouldn't have understood a word you said.'

'That's quite true, so I will give you my advice now. When you come back, take a house in Campià and say you want it for at least six months or a year. Even if you pay for six months, and only stay for two, you will find it very much cheaper than taking the house by the month. You could easily borrow or buy the few sticks of furniture you would need. Make sure that the house has a little garden and grow your own vegetables. Keep rabbits for your meat, and a goat for milk. In that way, signora, you would spend one-tenth of what you did at San Lorenzo. Rosina is my cousin, and although I'm ashamed to say so,' he added, with evident relish, 'I don't think much of her. We quarrelled about a pig. I had paid her for it and she said I hadn't. Bortolo, who had been present when I paid it, took my part. But Rosina abused me, signora, I never heard anything like it. *She is too fond of money.* I am ashamed to have to say so, because she is my cousin, but I don't think much of her. Orca cane, fancy charging you thirty lire a month for a room at San Lorenzo! Why, if you stayed much longer you'd have paid enough to buy the whole house! Do you know that both she and the boys are bragging that you pay Riccardo twenty lire a month for bringing your food up the mountain?'

'How amusing. Last month I paid him about nine lire. I pay him so much every time he comes, and when I go down I carry up my own things.'

Faustino's merry blue eyes twinkled. He was a fair-haired, rather stout man, with a bald patch on his head, one of the few who did not always wear a hat. His wife was in very poor health. She was consumptive and had not long to live.

'Riccardo is very tiresome about bringing my things up,' I went on. 'He never comes near Cornighe but he upsets my little girl. He pinches her and pulls her hair, or takes her toys away. There is always a squabble about something. I never quite know if he is very stupid or exceedingly clever.'

'I hardly know what to make of that boy myself,' said Faustino, 'but he is certainly not stupid. On the contrary, he is far too knowing. And so lazy and disobedient. . . . Do you know,' he added, lowering his voice to a confidential tone, 'that boy knows as much as any married man in Campià. When he grows up he will be a menace to the village. There's nothing that boy doesn't do or know, he will demoralise the others. Rosina can't manage him as it is. . . . Has Gioan caught any birds?'

'No, scarcely any.'

'Ostia, neither have I.' Faustino also set traps. 'Birds are scarce. But there is still time. In a week or two the migratory birds will be here, then you must come and see me catch them.'

'I shall be in England then,' I said, getting up.

'Oh, no, you must stay here always. We have become so accustomed to you, that you are like one of us.'

I left him and wandered aimlessly down into the valley. On the farther side I came upon two men cutting down a copse. For a while I watched, and then walked up to Girolomo. The other man, shy of

being seen in his patched workday clothes, went off out of sight. It was Giacomi. He was as sensitive as Toni about that.

Girolomo, noticing my critical look, shrugged his shoulders. 'One must make money somehow in a year like this,' he explained.

'It seems a pity to cut it.'

'You are right,' he replied, 'we didn't mean to cut it for some years, but you see the hailstorm has spoilt everything else. We shall make the wood into charcoal.'

I watched him chop the copse, feeling rather sad.

'They say,' he said presently, stopping for a minute, 'that we ought to pull up all the vines and make a bonfire of them. . . . But if we did that, signora, I do not know what we could grow in their place.'

Farther up the valley Gheco was burning charcoal. The copse belonged to the signor, and he employed Gheco to cut and burn it, paying so much for each kilo of charcoal delivered in the town. As jobs went on the mountain, it was not a bad one, and there was so much wood that Gheco would have plenty to do for the next ten years to come.

He had built himself a jolly little baita with thick walls made of brushwood. A large beech-tree stood before it, reaching nearly from side to side of the cleft, and spreading its protecting branches over the charcoal hearth. Leaning against the tree trunk was the precious board on which Gheco kept a tally of the sacks of charcoal sent down. In a little cave hollowed out of the cliff-side his two goats sheltered from the weather.

Apollonia's younger brother was working under Gheco, who felt both important and responsible. Just now Achille was at the top of the slope getting some billets down. He tied an immense bundle

together, about four feet in diameter, and set it in motion. It tumbled and rolled down, gaining speed as it went, but toppling awkwardly over a stone it took a new direction, and ran dead up against one of those trees left standing, because they were of a size forbidden to be hewn. Achille clambered down and tried to shift the bundle, but it was far too heavy. Finding it useless, he walked round and began cautiously to hack at the tree. He was in terror lest the bundle should roll down on top of him. Four times he had to clamber back and make another cut at the slender stem. At last, giving the bundle a vigorous push from above, the tree gave way and the bundle rolled down to the bottom.

Gheco was arranging a fresh stack of wood. A number of sacks packed with charcoal were standing about, ready to be taken away on donkeys. Apollonia, with a large straw hat askew on her head and kept on with a thick knitting needle stuck through the crown, was making fascines of the small wood that could not be used for charcoal. Loose ends of hair hung round her sunburnt face, and her big brown eyes were bright and friendly. She was talking loudly to Gheco.

I had often been there before, for I had sketched Gheco and Achille. Gheco had been a patient sitter, horrified when he saw I had painted in all the patches on his clothes, and very anxious that I should do his moustache justice. Whilst I was drawing Achille, Gheco and Apollonia sat in the baita talking. Apollonia laughed, and we could hear great smacking kisses. It was thought a sure thing that they were to be married, but as yet Gheco had not been to Apollonia's parents to make the final proposal for her hand. But he had decided to visit them the following Sunday.

I did not loiter long, but wandered up the track worn by Filip's oxen-wagon. The track was fringed with bushes. Fine rain fell gently and clouds blew across the crags. Big drops fell from the bushes. I left the track and walked on the grass, thinking how few flowers I had seen since the hay was cut. Dainty pink cyclamen grew among the bushes, and I had grown very fond of them. I gathered a few edible fungi and carried them in my hat.

Some one was talking loudly. As I came near I saw it was the little cowboy from the cattle farm. With great eloquence he was haranguing three stolid cows. He was the officer, they the recruits. He stopped abashed when he saw me and grinned! I had never seen any one with a face so like a monkey, especially about the nostrils.

I asked him what his name was.

'Angel,' he answered.

Then I asked how old he was.

'Thirty,' he replied, thinking I was inquiring how many cows there were.

I repeated my question once, twice, three times, and three times over again, but he only shook his head. It seemed extraordinary that he should not understand so simple a question—he must have learnt Italian at school.

Giving it up, I repeated my question in the language of Campià, saying, 'Quac agn ghe te ti?'

He answered promptly: 'Dodesz,' which means twelve.

Then he chased the cows off, for he knew as well as I did that they were out of bounds, grazing on the grassy slope belonging to Filip. I think the cowman found that a very good way of feeding the cows when grass was scarce. Once some of the cows strayed

right up to Cornighe and one of them devoured a napkin Marget had put out to bleach. Marget lodged a complaint. It wasn't the grass they ate—that was a mere trifle—she explained to the cowmen, but Filip did not like the cattle on the slope cutting the turf with their hoofs. She was given two pounds of butter as compensation.

I could hear Marget on the path above me calling to the goats, and I could hear the tinkle of goat-bells. I began to scramble up the last steep bit. The damp wind blew in my face. Half-way I stopped in surprise, for on one side of the slope the grass was dotted with flowers. Pale lilac flowers and a few white ones amongst them. They were autumn crocuses, so fresh and unexpected.

Upon the path I met Marget. She was trying to coax the goats home to shut them up for the night, but they had no intention of coming. They were the most contrary creatures. They stared at her impudently, just out of reach. Marget gave vent to her annoyance in a spirited flow of abuse, but the goats did not mind. In the end, when they had wearied of dodging her, they turned round and capered madly up the slope until the mist screened them from sight.

Marget watched for a moment, then shaking her fist at them, she shouted angrily: 'Bastard!'

Then she turned back, laughing at herself.

We walked home together, glad to be in the warm dry kitchen again, and made our evening soup. We spoke of Marget's little grandson who had just died. He was the son of Stefen and Maria, and had lived for only one short week. Stefen had been greatly disappointed when the baby died, for he had always longed for a son. The poor little mite's end had been tragic. The mother had no milk for him, so in their ignorance they fed the baby on café au

lait. Finding that diet did not agree, they gave him the best cow's milk they could procure, but did not know that it ought to have been diluted with water. As the baby still continued to be sick, they asked Francesco's wife, who had a baby a few months old, to suckle it. She was quite willing to do this, and would have done so from the first if she had been approached. However, it was too late. The following day the baby died, shortly after having been christened.

'And what did they call him?' I asked.

'He was called after Filip, *of course*,' answered Marget.

'Why "of course?"'

'Because it's the custom. The eldest boy is always called after his father's father, and the second boy after his mother's father. The eldest girl is called after her mother's mother, and the second one after her father's mother.'

That must have settled a great many of the children's names without further worry on the part of the parents. It also accounted for the fact that so many villagers bore the same Christian names. Cousins would be called alike. In order to distinguish between the different individuals they would be called by different diminutives. Thus the Francescos would be known as Franceschi, Gheco, or Cesco. Dominico would become Meneq or Minghi. If this was not sufficiently clear the nickname was added.

Not every family in Campià, but most of them, had a nickname which was hereditary. It could be used by any member of the family, but custom usually decided to whom it should be applied. The nickname was always placed after the Christian name, not before it, as the surname invariably was. For instance, the Bertoldis had the nickname Merlo (blackbird). Bartoldi Toni was known amongst his

friends as Toni Merlo, and his son, Vittorio Merlo. Toni's grandmother, who had been a dark woman with a beautiful voice had been the first to bear that nickname. Nino's branch of the family, although the elder one, did not use the name, but frequently boasted that they had every right to. Some of the Castellis were called Colombo (dove). The original Colombo was an uncle of Bortolo, but as the name was only borne by Colombo's descendants, Bortolo had no right to it. Gheco's family nickname was Macuccia, and the Silvestris were either Cumbu or else Marchini, according to which branch they belonged.

The Di Marchesis' nickname was Filip, Filip's real name being Dominico. He was never called Dominico, but just simply Filip. His younger brother was called Paolo Filip. Angelina was spoken of as Angelina Filipa or La Filipa, whilst the name was never associated with Marget. The original Filip had been Filip's grandfather's brother, who had been christened Filippo. I do not know why his nephew took his name and made a nickname of it. I never heard it used in connection with the grandchildren of the original Filip.

Most of these nicknames were of recent origin, but I do not believe the custom was a new one. Probably after a few generations the name would fall into disuse or a more appropriate one be invented. Or the fact that there might be six Dominicos in the village at once would make it imperative that one at least should bear a distinguishing nickname. It was a fact that ten per cent. of the male population were called Francesco.

These nicknames were by no means a custom confined to the village, but were common to the countryside.

Marget sat on the hearthstone picking over fungi, cutting the larger ones in half—preparatory to boiling and salting them for

the winter. Fungi were very plentiful on the mountain and there were very many different kinds and very few indeed which Marget did not consider edible. She had even gathered some fly agaric—bright vermilion fungi, spotted white, and was preparing them with the others.

'I've always been told that that sort is poisonous,' I informed her.

'So they are if you eat them like that. But if you boil them and drain them, and throw away the water and salt them, they are quite good to eat. We always prepare them like that.'

But I preferred to eat the kinds I knew, and there was no lack of them. Boletus scaber dotted the green grass everywhere. Cantherellus were not so plentiful, but we found a great many Lactarius deliciosus. And they were delicious. We put them upside down on the fire-tongs, poured olive oil into them, sprinkled salt and chopped parsley or onion, and roasted them over the embers.

I was glad of these fungi, as Rosina was very remiss in sending up our supplies.

Not only were there enough of them for us, but for every one else as well. At dawn the girls would come up from the village and gather fungi until they could carry no more. Between five and nine in the morning, the slopes below Cornighe would ring with the laughter and noisy gossip of these girls. Very often a peasant lad, out shooting, would loiter there and liven them up still more. And they would talk and laugh with him until he was out of earshot again. By nine o'clock the girls would have gone back to the village, and the slopes below Cornighe be once more silent and deserted.

I met Teresina there one morning, and helped her fill her basket.

She told me she had been up all night nursing Anetta, who had suddenly been taken ill with pains in her eyes. After giving Nino his breakfast at dawn, she had wandered up the mountain, that wearying two hours' walk, and had been on her feet ever since, looking for fungi. She was on her way home now, to give Nino his dinner.

She took a little dead bird from her pocket and showed it to me. She had seen it quite early that morning perching in a bush, its head tucked under its wing. She had just grabbed it. . .

Marget, the little girl, and I, did not confine our fungi hunting to the morning. We often went out together in the afternoon and became most enthusiastic fungi gatherers. Marget salted all we picked, and when she had enough for winter use she salted some for her daughter Francesca.

Once we went out on the slopes behind the pink villa, which had remained unoccupied during the summer owing to the bad weather. Thick clouds swept across the mountain, and we lost sight of each other, and could only see a small patch of ground at a time. By constantly calling we kept in touch, but no doubt we often went over the same ground, not knowing where the others had been. But we managed to fill our baskets. Tired and wet, our hair beady with the mist, we returned to Cornighe. Marget made up a large fire and we sat round it warming and drying ourselves.

I made some cocoa. At first Marget would not take any, but in the end curiosity overcame her scruples, for she had never tasted it before. She drank a bowlful with great satisfaction and seemed very pleased to think that she would now be able to have an opinion when other folk spoke about cocoa.

We sat talking by the fire for a long time. We were great friends

and latterly Marget had put off some of her reserve. To-night she discussed her neighbours.

Marget did not like Nino, nor did she think I ought to either. Hoping, perhaps, to turn me against him, she began, at first cautiously, to blacken his character, thinking, perhaps, that I too judged people by the rigid Di Marchesi standard, and that I should condemn on hearsay. However, she told me no more than I already suspected.

When Bortolo went to America, Nino, who was then unmarried, managed Bortolo's farm, staying nearly a year at San Lorenzo. That in itself was enough to make the villagers thoughtful, but when it ended by Rosina suddenly becoming ill and being carried off to hospital in a half-dying condition, it was rumoured that she had swallowed strong drugs to avoid a scandal.

The strange part of it was that Bortolo still had such affection for Nino. There was no one in the village he loved or esteemed more. Even his habit of seeing only the best of things could hardly overlook such an action in his friend. I never quite understood Bortolo. He must have known Rosina was faithless, Nino was by no means the only one her name was coupled with. As the Di Marchesis significantly said: 'Rosina will do anything for money.'

Perhaps Bortolo had been disgusted with her and didn't care any more. He deeply resented it if she showed him any affection in public. He, at least, had been a faithful husband, and the only scandal in which his name figured happened long before he was married. At that time he made love to a married woman whose husband had gone to America, where he remained for fifteen years. The woman had had four children, presently a fifth was born.

Bortolo, who was said to be its father, flatly denied it. He might have been believed if the boy had not grown up so like him. He was more like Bortolo than Bortolo himself.

The woman brought the child up, and when her husband returned from America he accepted the situation and treated the boy as if he were his own. He sent him to America as soon as he was old enough, and the young fellow came back to Italy for military service. He spent a short time at Campià. Neither Bortolo nor Rosina would speak to him. On one occasion he boldly went to San Lorenzo and ordered a drink. Without a word Rosina hastily placed the measure of wine on the table. Then she went out into the fields where the rest of the family had scattered at the lad's approach. So he sat alone in the empty house and drank his wine. Whether he was sad or amused I do not know. After having put the money on the table he walked back to the village.

It was a great pity so few men took their wives with them when they went to America. Statistics say that one-third of the Italians take their wives, but this is not true of Campià.

There were already twelve men from the village in America and seven more went out the autumn after the hailstorm. So that altogether twenty-four men had been, or still were, in the States. Six of these had made the journey twice. This was quite a large number when it is remembered that Campià had barely two hundred inhabitants, including children. Of these twenty-four men, only three had taken their wives to America with them.

Wives left behind in Campià invariably got into trouble, they were not to be trusted. Home-coming was often a tragedy—as if it hadn't been bad enough to have to go to America. . . . And

home-coming was sometimes put off, and in the end abandoned, because of a tragedy which could not be faced.

There was the woman the priest had relations with—she was as much given to drink as he was; there was Giacomina who had a lover. There was Julietta, herself above reproach, but said to be the child of a former Campià priest. This could not be excused on the plea that her mother had been abandoned by her husband, he had never been away from Campià. Neither had Cristofolo abandoned Anetta in that way. But her daughter Dominica was not like the others. It was supposed that her reason for disappearing for six years was because her sister had written an abusive letter, disclosing her parentage. Poor Dominica. Nevertheless she forgave them and came back rich, a benefactress to them all, forgiving even the hard blows which had made her run away in the first place.

Only one girl in the village had a bad reputation. She had had two children, the first being taken by the foundling hospital. And there was another girl who had a baby and who flatly refused to marry its father, although he moved heaven and earth to make her do so. Her refusal was reckoned as one of the most disgraceful things that had ever happened in Campià. The villagers with their wonderful solidarity, personally felt the taint of it.

Rosina told me the tale with horror in her voice. The village women would not speak to the girl, but I have no doubt she will live that down, as so many other things have been lived down in the village.

CHAPTER XVI

SAN LORENZO AGAIN

TOWARDS the end of September it became too cold and damp to make our stay on the mountain any longer enjoyable. I had always hoped for a spell of fine weather, but I had hoped in vain. Cold, thick clouds blew across the heights day after day, and it was sometimes as dark at midday as London in a fog. So I decided to go back to San Lorenzo for a few weeks before returning to England.

We were sorry to leave Cornighe. Our stay there had been very happy and we had grown quite fond of the Di Marchesis. With feelings of regret I watched Angelina and Marget load our baggage on the donkey. Marget's eyes were bright with unshed tears.

The donkey started to walk down the hill and to my concern I noticed that it limped.

In answer to my reprimands Angelina said that she had not known it. Did it matter?'

Marget said emphatically that it did not.

'How dare Minghi send me up a limping donkey?' I asked. 'Does he think I have a heart of stone?'

Angelina did not reply.

Marget spoke to the donkey. 'Num,' she said.

The animal started and limped down the path. We watched critically, It seemed unusually willing to go. . . .

'Come on,' said Angelina, who had a practical mind, 'there's no other donkey on the mountain, and if you don't have this one, you won't get your things down before to-morrow.'

I was watching the donkey—it had not stopped yet. If its leg had been very painful, I reasoned, surely it would have come to a dead stop long ago. After all, it did not limp so badly.

Marget said good-bye. She was staying at Cornighe for a few more days. She watched until we were out of sight round the bend and then walked back to the deserted cottage. Angelina told me afterwards that her mother went upstairs into our bedroom, and sat for a long while on the hay which had been our beds, the tears streaming down her old face.

.

I went back to San Lorenzo with misgivings. I did not want to fall out with Rosina, but I was afraid that I might. She had been so good to us whilst we were with her, still she had been very trying during our stay on the mountain. Besides, I had offended her, and what an offended Rosina was like I did not know.

It happened like this.

A few Sundays back Angelina and I had started off from Cornighe for a long walk to a distant village. We zigzagged down the northern slopes of the mountain into a beautiful valley, and following the course of a rushing stream, came out on to the new military road. Here I left Angelina and went back to bathe in a pool we had passed. She did not like the idea of a cold bath and so sat sat by the road and changed her shoes. She had brought her best boots in a paper parcel and now exchanged them for her zupei. Then she wrapped the zupei up in the paper and waited for me.

We arrived at the village in time for mass, and after dinner set out for Campià.

It was a very long walk and a very hot day. We arrived in the evening, both very tired. On making inquiries for a night's lodging, Giacomina offered me a bedroom in her house, and I was only too thankful not to have to go on to San Lorenzo. I was going up the mountain early next morning, and it would have been out of my way. Rosina did not expect me.

Giacomina showed me into a fair-sized bedroom which was used by her daughter, but ever since her lover had gone to America, Catina had been away in service. The room had been built on to the second floor of the house and stretched across the yard. Exactly underneath was the manure heap. Through a tiny trap-door in the floor, rubbish could be dropped down on to the heap.

Giacomina told me that they had had news from Gaetano. He had sent home £40. This money he had been able to save during the five months he had been away. Part of it was to repay her, for she had lent Gaetano the money for his fare, part of it was a loan to Nino to pay his fare to America, and forty lire was a present to his old father. Clear of his debts, Gaetano could now work and save.

'Then Nino will be able to go soon?' I remarked.

'Yes, poor fellow, he will try to.' Giacomina sighed and closed the window. She bid me good-night, and I wearily undressed, listening to the young people singing by the fountain. I wondered whether it would not be better to open the window. When shut, the smell of manure coming up through the plank floor into the hot room was intolerable; but when open, mosquitoes whirred in. I effected a compromise, and opened the window a little. After all,

what did it matter, open or shut, I was so tired I should drop asleep at once. Presently the young people clattered off to bed. It became very quiet and I fell asleep.

I awoke at dawn. The village was full of sounds. The men were off to work, some up the mountain, others down. Children were calling to goats and driving them up the mountain road. Oxen and braying donkeys were gathered round the trough, taking turns to drink whilst the women filled their copper pails at the tap. People shouted and bustled about, and some girls were singing. There was a smell of burning olive wood in the air from a dozen breakfast fires.

By five o'clock the last stragglers had passed by. The village was silent and deserted when the sun rose above Monte Moro.

Giacomina was downstairs making some coffee. She went out to buy me an egg and a roll, for which I paid, but she would not hear of my paying for the use of her room. No. She would be ashamed to take anything after I had been so good to her brother Nino. Would not I for once accept something from her?

Rosina had been furious.

What right had I to stay in the village, she asked, when San Lorenza was there? Why hadn't I come to her? *Who dare entice away her lodgers?*

She vented her feelings on poor Giacomina and others who passed by, whilst the temper was on her. What had been said came to my ears through Marget. Wild rumours were in the air. Rosina had said. . . . She had said a number of things, but I knew she would not be base enough to put them into practice. Nevertheless, it was with a feeling of uneasiness that I went back to San Lorenzo.

I had sent a note down by Riccardo saying that we were coming, so that Rosina could get in certain stores, as she always had done when she expected us.

Late in the afternoon we entered the gates of San Lorenzo. Our appearance must have been decidedly picturesque. In fact we looked like a couple of gipsies. My little girl carried Christine under one arm, and she was dressed like a boy, and ran barefoot by my side, her soft, fair hair tousled by the wind. My hair too was blown about. We were both as brown as sun and weather could make us. My clothes were shabby with wear and rain, and my hat, though still useful, was suffering visibly from old age. I carried a knapsack on my back and a long staff in my hand. Round my neck hung a necklace of dried hips, and my brown arms still bore the scratches that had been made when I picked them off the wild rose bushes. The donkey, laden with various parcels, and all manner of things not wrapped up, completed the picture. Angelina was by far the most presentable-looking of the party.

Rosina was standing by the door, and the little one, thrusting her doll into my hand, scampered down the path to be embraced.

Two fashionable Italian ladies who were staying at San Lorenzo, regarded us with some surprise. They were walking under the pergola, each carrying a parasol to shade her delicate complexion from the rays of the sun. But they stopped to stare at us.

Rosina, who was all honey, helped me to unload the donkey and carry the things upstairs. The house was evidently quite full.

Signora Rosa and her ten-year-old daughter were in one room. Signora Bianca and her little girl were in the other, whilst her two little boys—who had probably been using my room—now slept

downstairs with Bortolo, Paolino, and Riccardo, all five of them in the big bed!

Ever since the hailstorm, Bortolo had been strangely irritable. The peaceful old fellow would get angry and flare up about nothing. Rosina dare not answer back! I suspected a scene or two in which she must have been worsted, for her manner towards him had altered. She had become tactful and considerate—half in pity, perhaps, for she knew how bitter had been his disappointment. . With what love he had worked, with what hope he had looked forward to the promise of a splendid harvest. Alas, he was not gathering it in, instead, he was clearing the rubbish away, or trying to put some heart into the sorry-looking vines.

In the mulberry-tree, just outside my bedroom window he had rigged up a swing, and here the children played continually, screaming at the tops of their voices. They squabbled the whole time. Signora Bianca's two little boys were particularly spiteful, and if it was not they upsetting the little girls, it was Riccardo pinching and punching the lot of them. They quarrelled for turns in the swing, forcibly ejecting each other. Then somebody would get knocked over and shriek.

Unfortunately my little girl fell ill. She became feverish, complained of a headache, and suffered so much from the noise that I had to ask the children to go away and play elsewhere. They took no notice whatever of what I said, but after staring at me, went on playing as before. So I went down into the kitchen and asked Rosina to tell them to go away. She went out and spoke to them, but they took no notice of her either.

By this time the sick child was frantic.

I went to Rosina again.

'The noise must be stopped,' I said.

'I can't do anything.' She shrugged her shoulders.

'Then the swing must be taken down.'

'If the child is as ill as all that,' said Rosina rudely, 'you ought to have a doctor—that is what Signora Bianca thinks too!'

'What the child needs is quiet so that she can sleep,' I answered, 'surely that is not asking too much. She cannot sleep with such a noise. Why can't the children play somewhere else this afternoon—the garden is large enough.'

Rosina, who evidently meant to be disagreeable, shrugged her shoulders again. But Signora Bianca, who had overheard our conversation, went out.

'Be good children,' she called sweetly, 'and go away from the swing, the little English girl is ill and wants to sleep.'

Having done her duty thus far she came indoors. Experience must have taught her that she was never obeyed.

'Where is Bortolo?' I asked in desperation, and found him by the stable. I suggested that he should take the swing down and put it up elsewhere. It would have taken him five minutes and there were a number of suitable trees on the other side of the house.

But he did not want to take it down. Instead he fetched a ladder and twisted the ropes out of reach. The six children ran off and for five minutes it was quiet and peaceful.

Presently Riccardo came noiselessly across the grass in his socks. Stealthily he climbed the tree and unwound the swing ropes. In a moment the others were around him, pushing and shouting for turns.

I went straight to Bortolo.

'If the swing isn't taken down in five minutes,' I said, ready to burst with anger, 'I shall run up to Campià and find some one else to do it for me—and pay them for it!'

This was too much for Bortolo. He took the swing down at once and put it on the farther side of the house, where the children played and squabbled to their hearts' content, without annoying any one.

The sick child became calmer and slept restlessly, waking up at intervals to cry.

Rosina, who was off to town, promised to bring up some medicine for her. However, she came up later without any, she had forgotten it . . . and apologised.

The next day the little one was better. I went down to get breakfast.

Outside, close by the door, sat Signora Rosa. She wore a checked petticoat and a bright pink dressing jacket. Rosina was combing and brushing her hair with the dexterity of a hairdresser, at the same time keeping up a loud-voiced conversation with Stefen and Giuseppe, who had passed by and had now reached the gates.

'Rosina, where are my eggs?' I asked, when I could not find them.

'There are no eggs,' said Rosina, 'they are not to be had.'

'But surely, in Campià——'

'No,' said Rosina.

'And where are my other things' I asked.

'Other things?' repeated Rosina, affecting surprise, 'you never sent a message by Riccardo about anything.'

'But, Rosina,' I protested. 'You know you always get bread and eggs and butter for me . . .'

Rosina went on combing Signora Rosa's long dark hair.

'You'd better take some of my bread,' she said at last, 'you know, in the basket on the wall.'

The day passed peacefully. The children played by the spring down in the valley, and after dinner Signora Bianca lay down to rest. I noticed that Rosina had no difficulty whatever in keeping the children quiet during that time.

.

On Sunday there were great rejoicings in the town. It was the twenty-fifth anniversary that the priest had held office, and the townspeople had collected hundreds of lire to defray the cost of the festivities.

In the morning there had been a procession to the church, and a magnificent choir took part in the service. And now in the afternoon a special band was to play in the piazza, and later in the evening there would be fireworks and illuminations.

In Campià these festivities were looked upon with little favour. That does not mean that the villagers did not go down to the town and enjoy the music and the illuminations—nearly every one went. But they thought it wrong—wrong in principle that so much money should be spent on frivolity when the villages round about were suffering heavily from the hailstorms.

Rosina, Signora Rosa, Signora Bianca, and all the children, except Riccardo and Paolino, had gone to the town directly after dinner. The boys were to follow in the evening.

Together with my little girl I strolled up the road. The wind fitfully wafted sounds of music along the mountain side. Peasants were hurrying down to the town, eager to hear the band.

On our way we met Riccardo, dawdling along towards the village with his hands in his pockets.

'I'm going to fetch Minghi,' he informed me, 'for the cow.' Minghi was always called in when the cows calved.

'I think Minghi must be in the town,' I answered. 'I met him going down about two hours ago. But maybe he's home again by now.'

'I'll go and see.' Riccardo sauntered on.

'But Riccardo, you ought to hurry——'

'He, he,' he called back vacantly.

I hastened to San Lorenzo. Bortolo was running between the cowshed and the kitchen, where he was warming some food for the cow.

'Bortolo,' I called, 'I don't believe Minghi is in the village—he went to town two hours ago.'

'*Per Dio!*' exclaimed Bortolo, 'and I've just sent Riccardo to Campià. Paolino, Paolino!' he called.

Paolino emerged from the cowshed.

'Minghi is probably in the town——'

Paolino did not wait to be told, but tossing off his zupei, ran barefoot down the path and on to the town.

Bortolo was greatly agitated. We entered the cowshed together.

'The poor animal—the poor animal—she is suffering,' ejaculated Bortolo. He stroked her gently. 'The food must be hot by now,' he added, and hurried restlessly to the kitchen.

Presently he returned with the food and tried to coax the cow to drink. But the poor beast would not.

'Oh, she suffers, she suffers,' exclaimed Bortolo, nearly breaking

his heart over her. The perspiration trickled down his face. 'My poor cow . . . if only Minghi would come.' He glanced through the door at the village road. 'Why doesn't Riccardo come back?'

It was nearly an hour since I had seen him on the road. I wondered how long Paolino would take to get to the town and find Minghi.

Bortolo went about restlessly, lamenting over his cow. I never saw a man so upset. Perhaps in remote ages his ancestors worshipped the cow—that might account for his agitation now. I hardly believe he would have fussed so much over his wife. Ah, he grieved for his cow, his kind heart bled for her. He stood stroking her back and soothing her with his voice. 'The poor thing—she suffers,' he kept on saying. The cow held her head low and moaned.

Just then I caught sight of Paolino and Minghi coming down the path as fast as they could walk.

'I found . . . him . . . in . . . a . . . café,' Paolino called, out of breath.

'You never got as far as the town?' I asked, thinking he must have met Minghi on the road.

'Yes, I did, I believe I got down in a quarter of an hour.'

It was certainly a record. Bortolo might well be proud of his eldest son. But where was Riccardo? He was in the village playing ball with some other boys. Evidently he did not think it necessary to come home to tell his father Minghi was not there. He did not return before it was time for him to go down to see the fireworks.

.

The following evening I went through the accounts with Rosina.

'Why,' I asked, 'have you charged me half a lire for a kilo of

bread, when you know the price has been considerably lower for some time?'

For a moment she was taken aback.

'I have charged half a lire because that is a round sum,' she answered, 'besides there are always things I don't put down. . . . For example, matches.'

'Matches are included in furnished rooms,' I suggested.

'I never thought a lady like you would make a fuss about a halfpenny.'

'I would not do so if you had sent up the full amount of bread.'

Rosina did not answer.

This was the point, I believe, where the ladies Rosina was used to have dealings with became angry and even abusive. Then she could get angry too and let off steam in a regular row. But being in the wrong, she could not very well begin to quarrel—however much she ached to. She did not know what to say, so she said nothing. Now, if only I had called her a thief—or a cheat.

I said nothing further about the bread, but went into one or two other matters that had aroused my suspicions. Then I watched her refill my oil-bottle and found that it did not contain as much as she had been charging me for. Silently she submitted to my altering the price in the book.

I left her and hurried off to Campià, before she could find words to express her feelings.

After calling at the inn to ask Teresina to have some supper ready for me in half an hour, I went off to find some eggs. I had no difficulty in procuring some. The fact was Rosina would not pay full market price to the village people. She beat down the

prices and, having secured the eggs, sold them to her lodgers at a handsome profit. Campià women preferred to take the eggs to town, rather than be the means of putting a few pence into Rosina's pocket.

I went back to the inn. Teresina had spread a white cloth at the end of one of the long tables and laid it for three. She took it for granted that we should have supper together, and put off her own meal until it should suit me to turn up. We sat down together, she and Nino on one side of the table, I on the other.

The story of the swing had already penetrated to the village in detail, and Teresina was eager to give me her views on the subject.

'Rosina had no business to treat you like that,' she said. 'It was wrong in the first place to put the swing under your window. We all remarked that you wouldn't like it. As for the children. . . . As though Rosina didn't know how to keep children quiet!'

'Per Dio, she need only have appeared at the door with a broomstick,' said Nino.

'You would have been in the right if you had sent her straight back to the town for the medicine she forgot!'

'She ought to know better than to disobey you, when you are the padrona.'

I felt I had quite underrated my powers as padrona.

'And how about you,' I asked Nino, 'are you going to America?'

'Signora, I have seen the agent, and it is quite impossible for me to go like the others do. But I can go to Canada. They aren't so particular there whether one has two eyes or not. Once in Canada I can work my way down to Buffalo and cross the frontier into the States. But go I shall—even if it had to be first class on a liner. It would pay me,' he added optimistically.

'How soon will you go?'

'Next month.'

'And your wife?'

'She and Battisti will come later, as soon as I have saved the money for their tickets.'

'Aren't you pleased?' I asked Teresina.

She smiled at me.

'You won't like it when you are there,' I said, giving her the four palanche she charged for as much minestra as I could eat.

'They all write home and say it's horrid,' said Teresina. 'Poor Mrs Cominelli is very unhappy. She, who is used to living on a mountain, is now at the bottom of an ugly valley . . . with no view at all and hardly any air to breathe. She says it's hateful, and every day she thinks of Campià and longs to be back. . . .'

'How about your licence?'

'Rosina wishes it to be transferred back to her at the new year.'

'What a relief to my mind! She could never go on selling wine like that without being caught sooner or later.'

It was time for me to go home and I hurried through the tunnel. Turning sharply into the road I nearly ran into Minghi's plain daughter. I made the best of this opportunity to tell her of the limping donkey, and the more I said the bigger her eyes grew.

'But, signora, the donkey eats just the same, whether she limps or not,' she excused herself, 'and she must work for her keep!'

'You don't work if you have a sore foot,' I answered, 'yet you have a good appetite.'

'But, signora—I am a human being.'

It was twilight when I reached the gates of San Lorenzo. Standing on one side of the road was Gheco, on the other two women sat on the grass. One was elderly, the other held a hat over her face, obviously to hide it. Could it be Apollonia?

The gate slammed behind me and I stumbled down the uneven path.

Bortolo had carried the kitchen table out into the garden and had put the lamp on it. He was reading the newspaper. Rosina was sewing. The dog ran barking to meet me, and Bortolo looked up to see who was coming.

Rosina, who had been thinking matters over, had come to the conclusion that it was best to keep in with me. So she was very amiable. In order to demonstrate that she still cared for my interests, she had asked Cristofolo, who had passed by, to inquire down at the post office if any letters had come for me.

'Where are the boys?' I asked.

'They are in bed,' she answered.

'So early?'

'Yes, signora, Bortolo gave Riccardo a good beating.' She sighed. 'He heard him swearing—using the most wicked words.'

Bortolo seemed very interested in the newspaper.

I told her of the trio I had seen by the gate.

'Ah!' she cried, with sudden interest. 'Apollonia, of course. So she has come back and her mother with her, I suppose. . . . She ran away yesterday, because La Macuccia was more unbearable than usual, and scolded her. Apollonia, who is young, answered back. They had words, and Apollonia put on her hat and just marched home.'

'And?' I asked.

'Gheco went all the way after her to-day, to make peace and bring her back. . . . So Apollonia has decided to return. How any one can live with La Macuccia I don't know. Do you know they only pay that girl five lire (4s. 2d.) a month, beyond her keep?'

'Is she going to marry Gheco?' I asked.

Rosina shrugged her shoulders. 'Apollonia's mother isn't much in favour of it. She thinks her daughter might do better.'

'And Apollonia?'

'She says she likes Gheco and wishes to marry him—but that she cannot disobey her mother.'

Oh, dear! That was like Angelina, who wouldn't talk to Raimondo because her mother did not like it. I wondered whether the women folk were stirred by passions as deep and strong as the men.

At ten o'clock we went up to bed as usual. Shortly after midnight I woke up.

Some one was banging at the front door. There was a pause, then renewed banging and a great deal of talking. I got out of bed and leant out of the window, which was at the side of the house. I could hear the voices more distinctly. The knocking vibrated through the house.

'They are—ostia—either asleep—ostia—or dead—ostia,' said some one in a drunken voice.

'Ostia—knock again,' said some one else.

There was more banging, followed by a dead silence. I wondered why Rosina did not get up and find out what it was all about. Of course she must have heard the noise.

I went back to bed.

Away they banged at the door, stopping every now and then to argue. One was for going home, but the other two would not hear of it, and urged each other to bang at the door with renewed vigour.

At last, after a quarter of an hour, curiosity got the better of Rosina. She slipped a dress over her nightgown and, going out on to the balcony, asked what they wanted.

It was Cristofolo's familiar voice that answered.

'I came to say—ostia—that I called in at the post office—ostia—as you asked me to—ostia—and that there were *not* any letters for the signora.'

Rosina's answer was hardly polite.

The other two at once began clamouring for something to drink. They were so thirsty they couldn't walk on to Campià—just a little wine?

Rosina referred them to the rain-water tank; but that would not do at all.

Cristofolo interrupted. 'I wanted to tell you that I have been to the post office—ostia—but that there were no letters for the signora.'

'I heard you,' shouted Rosina impatiently. 'Now be off!'

But they wouldn't budge. They tried to wheedle her into coming downstairs to open the door. They argued with her, but she wouldn't let them in. Safe upon the balcony she shouted at them and insulted them.

What matter the insults, thought the thirsty men, if we can only get her to open the door?

In the end, after they had all had a good shout and thoroughly awakened all the inmates of the house, Rosina gave in. She lit the



Nocturnal Visitors.

lamp and opened the door. She might have done so at once, because it always ended that way. She couldn't resist the temptation of making a palanca, besides, the men were so obstinate. They wouldn't go. She couldn't have the door banged all night.

For fully half an hour they sat drinking in the kitchen, carrying on a most animated conversation. At last they went off, talking loudly, and for a long while we could hear their voices in the distance.

Rosina, with a great deal of sighing over the hard lot of those forced to get up at night, went back to bed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST DAYS

SIGNORA ROSA and Signora Bianca promenaded about San Lorenzo, usually deep in conversation. They found me very poor company. Our interests were widely different, and they were disappointed to find that their favourite topic scarcely interested me. Fashion was what they talked about, fashions, hats and the cost of their clothes. Signora Bianca's little girl wore a hat that cost seventeen lire. Signora Rosa had only given fifteen and a half lire for her child's hat—but she outdid Signora Bianca's extravagances when it came to jackets. I do not know what effect it would have had on either lady if I had divulged that my aged hat had cost only two and a half lire. They thought me odd enough as it was. My interest in the peasants was quite incomprehensible to them, and they looked at my sketches and did not understand them at all. They liked sentimental and romantic works of art, such as ladies should paint.

They did not care for the peasants, whom they considered far beneath them. In fact, their mode of living seemed to aim at accentuating the differences between themselves and the lower classes. The peasants looked healthy, sunburnt, and vigorous. The signori were languid and cultivated pale complexions. They carefully screened the sunshine from their houses, closing the big shutters early in the

day. In these sombre sunless rooms they lived, taking but little exercise out of doors. No wonder they looked pale and delicate.

The four children were undersized, giving the impression that they had grown up in the dark and had been unwisely fed. At San Lorenzo they ran about in the sun and grew brown and a little sturdy. Rosina looked after them well. They were fed rather differently from peasant children, going to the other extreme, which was perhaps as unfortunate. They were given a maximum of meat and a minimum of vegetables and bread, and of course a lot of wine. Rosina insisted on the children eating polenta with their meat, which, I think, did a great deal to pick up their constitutions. They were never given puddings of any description.

The signori had none of the easy-going pleasant manners which made the peasants so attractive. They were hampered with formal and chilling conventionalities which went well in harmony with their sunless rooms. It was in them to be hard and selfish. Hedged in with artificiality, and brought up in an atmosphere of false values, they had little experience of things that matter—of real life. No wonder they understood the peasants as little as the peasants understood them.

I once met an elderly commercial traveller at San Lorenzo. He was not at all like these ladies. He was charming, his manners were delightful, and he was full of life and energy. In him the best qualities of the signor and peasant were united. He was an enlightened and highly-educated man. His son was a doctor in Milan. I cannot believe that he was an isolated type, but I met so many people like Signor Bianca and Signora Rosa and the Signor of the

mountain, that that type must be the more representative of the signori who came in touch with the peasants in those parts.

Signora Bianca was very pretty, and her summer frocks were dainty and cool-looking. She was quite a picture sitting under the olive-trees with her gay parasol. Signora Rosa joined her, and they sat wondering about the English signora.

It was all very well for Rosina to insist on the eccentric millionaire story. The two ladies knew better. Eccentric—perhaps, but wealthy—no. That tale was all very well for the country people who were ignorant and would believe anything.

The peasants had accepted us and put a very simple construction on our doings. They noticed that I did not wear grand clothes nor live in grand style. Nevertheless, they firmly believed that I was an heiress.

When I went to live in the mountain hut where there was a minimum of comfort, and to sleep on hay, Gioan remonstrated with me. In glowing colours he described how he would spend a holiday if he were rich. I pointed out to him that what I wanted was a change, and what change could be greater from the wild whirl of dissipation he pictured my life in England to be—than the quiet of the mountain? But Gioan simply would not believe any lady would live in a mountain hut from choice. No, no, he shook his head. He had only wanted to sound me himself, but he knew quite well the true motives that drove me to it. That had been decided in the village long ago, and had been whispered from door to door.

'Signora Antonia is doing penance.'

That accounted for everything to the peasant mind.

'If the signora does not wear stockings, it is not that she cannot afford them,' Ghita reassured her friends.

One morning Signora Bianca went down to the town to do some shopping, and buy some eggs. She returned about an hour before dinner time, rather hot from her walk, and sat down in the kitchen to undo her parcels. One was a large tin box containing about twenty new-laid eggs. The children crowded round her and she distributed the eggs as if they had been so many sweets. She gave one to my little girl, and offered one to me. The children ran joyfully into the garden sucking their eggs.

Rosina was astounded at such extravagance.

.

I went out into the garden and up to Campià.

The women at the fontana were getting ready to go home as I passed by, hanging the dripping clothes on to both ends of a long stick which was carried balanced on the shoulder. In this way the washing was taken up to the village, where it was dried and ironed. The linen was never boiled, but put in a large wooden wash tub. A piece of sheeting was spread over the top and a spadeful of wood-ash put on it. Boiling water was scooped over the ashes and drained down through the sheeting, running out of a bung hole at the bottom. Afterwards the linen was rinsed and hung up to dry, looking as white as snow.

I strolled on up the road and passed an old woman who saluted me by raising her straw hat. A few sad plants which the hailstorm had not quite spoilt looked lonely on the terraces. Bruised bunches of grapes hung on the vines. Higher up at the tap in the wall, children were filling water bottles. Campià people always fetched their

drinking water from this tap, although it was much farther to walk than the village fountain.

A few men were squatting in the road outside Giacomina's house.

I went straight to Cristofolo's, because I wished to say good-bye to Dominica and her husband and Teschini, who were leaving on the morrow.

Poor Anetta had gone away. After suffering agonising pains in her eyes she had completely lost her sight, and the skill of the doctors and the specialist to whom Dominica sent her, were quite unable to restore it. She was cared for now in an institution in the town, and for the first time in his life Cristofolo was master in his own house.

I mounted the stairs and entered the kitchen, which was filled with people sitting round the walls.

Bigi was gently playing the mandoline to Tona's accompaniment. Tona sat on the hearthstone, Maria beside him. Her husband, Stefen, sat in the chimney corner, Giuseppe's fair-haired nephew by his side. Big Giuseppe sat opposite them, solemnly smoking his long-stemmed pipe. Bigi, with his mandoline, and Giacomina, who was knitting, were on the maize-meal chest. Julietta sat on a chair by the door. Dominica, between her adoring husband and old Cristofolo, was listening to Giuseppe's loud-voiced wife, eager to hear the latest feat of her enterprising baby. Several of Giuseppe's elder children were there, too. A chair was offered me close to Julietta and Teschini.

We talked gaily together, with the music as a sort of background. One of Cristofolo's granddaughters handed round glasses of vermouth, pressing the reluctant to drink. It was good manners to be reluctant

Dominica had engaged this girl as servant and was taking her to Florence. The girl looked a little flushed and excited. . . .

Every one was full of the latest news. Dominica had bought a piece of land on the Ridge of Houses. So that old site would be used again. She was going to build a house on it, in which to spend future summer holidays. There would be no lack of stones for building purposes and the fontana would be quite close. But it was uncomfortably near the edge of a precipice. The whole plot, which had been bought from Agostino, cost twelve pounds.

Those friendly to Agostino said the place was worth double the money, others said it was outrageously dear. Dominica, however, was well satisfied.

At first she had tried to buy a plot on the mountain. The first place selected had been at such a distance from the village that it had been rejected as too inconvenient. I knew the plot well, I should like to build a house there myself. It was just below the summit, a long level stretch of grass fringed with beech-trees.

After that Dominica went to Filip, but he flatly refused to sell. No Di Marchesi sold land, it was his policy to accumulate it. Next Negretti was approached, but his daughter, the cross-eyed milliner, wanted the coveted plot herself. Finding no other site that pleased, Dominica looked elsewhere and at last decided on the Ridge of Houses. From a practical point of view it was by far the best place.

Teschini had taken no part in our conversation, but sat silent beside me, deep in thought. Suddenly he stood up, commanding our attention by his attitude.

'My dear friends,' he began, and we all stopped chattering to fix our eyes on him.

'My dear friends,' he repeated, as soon as we were all quiet, 'I am leaving you to-morrow, and I want to say a few words before I go. I want to tell you how much I appreciate and honour the good people of Campià. Listen. . . . When I left Florence I was a butterfly—a butterfly with a broken wing. For three months I wandered, vainly trying to ease the pain. But to no purpose, until by chance I came to join my friends here. . . . In this little village—this gem of the mountain, I began to live again and to wish to go on living. Neither the mountain—the clear air—the polenta, nor the fine views gave me this renewed life. No—it was you—you yourselves. . . . From the first I felt I was amongst friends. Although I had no claim on you, you overflowed with good will. Many the happy hours we have spent together when the day's work was done. I passed among you in the fields and saw that your life was ceaseless toil and not very much to show for it—that made me admire your tenacity and courage. . . . Then the hailstorm came. . . . I saw the hail and the fields afterwards. . . . My friends, had those fields been mine, I would have been crushed with grief and despair. But that is not your way. The day after the storm you were at work as early as usual, thinking, probably, of next year. The following Sunday you actually danced and were merry. Yet there was not one amongst you who doubted that the winter will be a terribly hard one to face. . . . And there will be some of you forced to go to America. . . . I envy you the spirit with which you have met this disaster, your patience and your eagerness to go on working and to make the best of it. It is your example that has strengthened me. I thought to cure my wound by light living, but it healed as I gained peace and courage. . . . My friends—let me once again thank you and tell



Teschini Makes a Speech.

you that never, as long as I live, will I forget my friends in Campià.'

Teschini sat down.

'Thank you—thank you, many thanks,' murmured the listeners round the wall. We were all much moved.

'Signor Teschini,' I said, leaning towards him, 'had I known what you were going to say, I would have asked you to include me in your speech. Not a word you have said but it had an echo in my heart. I, too, have learnt a lesson here.'

'Aren't they splendid?' he asked, and then shook his head, as if the thought pained him. 'I am an Italian myself, but yet I had no idea that such people were to be found in Italy. I was born in Rome. It has been a revelation to me.'

It was some little time before conversation was in full swing. Bigi played several gay tunes and Giuseppe was pressed to sing, but refused.

Teschini stood up again and we looked at him expectantly.

'I should like to say a few more words—for the Signora Antonia,' he said, to my astonishment. 'She is not able to make a speech herself in our language nor is it necessary for her to do so, for what she wishes to say you have doubtless all read in the eloquence of her eyes. Like me, she came to Campià with a broken wing—like me she has grown strong here. She wishes me to thank you for all your kindness and hospitality, and to tell you that in her heart she will never forget Campià nor the example of the good people here. On your behalf I will say that there is no one who will not be sorry when she leaves, or who does not hope she will come back again. Pleased that she should have been happy here, it has been a joy to us to

know a signora who is so beautiful and intelligent, and who has been the friend of every one. In the name of Campià—viva la signora!'

.

The next day was Sunday. Some of the men were playing la balla in the village street, and most of the other people were out in the road talking. A number were up at the fountain sitting on the stones just outside Giacomina's courtyard, or squatting, Eastern fashion, in the road. A second group was outside the Di Marchesi's shed. Angelina and Gioan were there, and Bigi and several others, myself amongst them. Some sat on doorsteps, others on stones, and a few on the ground. We were all talking at once about nothing in particular.

Gioan was playing with Biscotti's baby, which a child had been carrying. He held the baby on his knee and tried to make it smile, but it looked at him with big serious eyes. He was very gentle and sweet with it.

Bigi, who had been sitting opposite, crossed the road and sat down on the ground beside me.

Costante from an adjacent doorstep began to sing 'Tripoli.'

'What did you think about the acquisition of Tripoli?' I asked Bigi.

'Only that it wasn't worth the number of lives sacrificed,' he answered. 'The men that have been there say there is nothing but sand.'

'If you dig the sand away there is plenty of soil underneath,' said Gioan, 'but the first wind blows the sand back again. So I've been told.'

'No doubt our statesmen know to what end it was acquired,' remarked Bigi, 'but they do not let us into those secrets.'

'Gaetano hated the place,' put in Teresina.

'Signora,' said Bigi, 'I hear there has been warfare even at San Lorenzo. You have fallen out with Rosina. I am not surprised.'

'No,' I answered, 'she made me very angry.'

'I only just heard about it. You know, it would be a good thing if Bortolo gave Rosina a sound beating sometimes. It's the only way to keep a woman like that reasonable. But if anything further happens to make it unpleasant for you at San Lorenzo, we could always put you up in our house. Now that Dominica has gone, there is plenty of room.'

'Thank you, Bigi,' I said, 'that is very kind of you, but you know we are leaving to-morrow.'

'So people have been saying, but I did not know that it was true. I was afraid that Rosina was being unpleasant and that you did not know where to turn to for a night's lodging.'

Two strangers came in sight beyond the fountain. As they were not peasants but signori, all conversation ceased. The men playing la balla waited.

The strangers were tourists, a lady and a gentleman, dressed as only German tourists know how to dress. We sat silent as they came, each assuming the mask of cold indifference with which the peasant greets a stranger of the upper class. I felt I must have acquired that look as well. . . .

They passed by and until out of earshot we remained passive. Gioan, without moving, broke the silence.

'Tudesg,' he said contemptuously. That means 'Germans.'

I remembered my first walk through Campià and how those indifferent looks had chilled and even frightened me. With what

little confidence I had gone to the dance at the inn. Things were certainly different now. I was a friend and might sit and talk in the street. No one scooted off when I came; on the contrary, sometimes more would come if they saw me and we would be quite a party.

But it needed a great deal of tact and patience to become so intimate. After all, what did I know about them? It was very little. I was on the threshold and now I was leaving—to go back to England.

Ghita came down the street in her dignified manner.

'Si'ora,' she shouted at me, 'there will be dancing to-night, call in for me on your way up.'

.

Ghita was waiting in the street when I came, and emerged from one of the shadows. We walked along arm in arm. It was pitch dark. Ghita, who ought to have been familiar with the uneven street, stumbled frequently. I clung to her arm and we laughed together.

We turned into the Piazza. From the dimly-lighted inn could be heard the voices of men playing murra. A boy hung out of the window and gazed into the blackness.

Crossing over to the side of the church, Ghita led me up some steps and along a winding passage. It brought us into a large and very long kitchen. An old man and an old woman were sitting peacefully on either side of the hearth. Ten years ago, the old man had spent two years in America. His aged wife was as lively and as amusing as her brother Cristofolo. Her only sister had been Nino's mother.

We were among the first-comers, but the room filled rapidly.

Giacomi and Giacom came with mandoline and 'cello. Tona, who had promised to play, was not to be found. Toni had gone to the town and might come later.

Some one was sent to look for Tona.

Presently some one else was sent to look for Tona.

A stranger came into the room, a tall, dark, and very ugly man. He was a peasant just back from a fifteen years' stay in America. He still suffered from the hysteria of home-coming. The greater part of the day he had spent at the inn, drinking copiously of Teresina's best wine at one lire the bottle. But why he chanced on Campià, or where he was going, nobody seemed to know. He was blissfully happy to be in his dear Italy once more. No one paid much attention to him, although he talked continuously both in Italian and broken English, little dreaming that there was any one present who could understand the latter language. Nor did any one trouble to enlighten him on that point.

At last Tona came.

Giacomi, as captain of the band, upbraided him whilst Giacom glared with reprimanding blue eyes. It had been arranged earlier in the day that they should play, and Tona had promised to come. Why had he kept them waiting? Tona had a good deal to say in his defence, and all three players shouted at each other. The bystanders joined in, and there was a storm of words.

Just as I thought a free fight must be inevitable it all ended in a laugh.

To tell the truth, Tona had been unable to tear himself away from the society of a man from the town, who had been teaching him some new tunes.

The players struck up a polka, and we were so eager to dance and had waited so long, that we crowded the room, and couples turned and bumped against other couples.

No one would dance with the intoxicated stranger, but that did not daunt him. After having begged every woman in the room for a dance—and been refused, he remained by the wall watching the others. During the intervals he had the whole floor to himself and strolled about, talking and joking good-naturedly with any one and every one. Nobody encouraged him, the women were stiff and hardly answered. The men watched him critically, ready to turn him out at the slightest indiscretion. Any one in a less blissful state of mind would have felt snubbed! But not he. He persisted, and, finding him good-humoured and irrepressible, the women relented. They began to answer him back. Towards the end of the evening he dominated the intervals, and finding his audience at last responsive, expanded, becoming more and more amusing. But he was not able to persuade any one to dance with him.

It was not long before Toni turned up, and with him Lucia, carrying little Emilio. She sat down on the vacant chair beside me, whilst Toni walked across the room to join the players.

I looked at little Emilio and marvelled at him. Lucia brought up her children on the survival of the fittest principle, and Emilio looked as if he was going to survive. He would be the sixth survivor of eleven children.

Lucia leant towards me and whispered confidentially:—

'I hear you had a quarrel with Rosina.'

'Yes,' I answered.

'I just wanted to tell you that we thought you would find her

out in the end. We know what sort of a lady *she* is.' Lucia readjusted Emilio, who was rapidly falling asleep. 'I don't want to say any more—but you understand—we know what she's like—now you do.'

She glanced searchingly at my eyes to see if I understood her. Satisfied with what she saw, she concentrated her attention on Emilio.

Lucia did not refer to the subject again. She did not ask for my version of the affair, nor did she say a word about her own experiences of Rosina.

The stranger was in the middle of the room again. Taking his blue silk pocket-handkerchief in one hand he crushed it into a little ball. Then he opened his hand wide, letting it lie on his palm. The handkerchief slowly distended itself, rebelling against such treatment. Then he wiped it off his hand and held it up for inspection. There was not a mark, not a crease on it. Truly a wonderful piece of silk!

The old woman had fetched a bowl of water and was splashing the brick floor again to lay the dust. The players struck up.

'Come on, signora,' said Filip's niece, slipping off her zupei to dance in her stockings.

'How is your brother getting on?' I asked. 'Does he still think a soldier's life is too awful?'

'Oh, no,' she laughed, 'he writes now that he never enjoyed himself as much as he does now. He simply loves it!'

We sat down together. The stranger walked across to the players and begged Giacomi for his mandoline. Giacomi did not want to give it up. The stranger was obstinate, having once got it into

his head that he wanted to play. Nothing could stop him. They tried to dissuade him, but he wouldn't listen. He was told not to make a fool of himself: there was nothing he wanted more. There were several offers to see him home to his lodging. No thanks, he wanted to play the mandoline.

So he sat down and Giacomi reluctantly gave him his cherished instrument. Tona, who was good-natured, agreed to accompany a tune he had never heard before.

The stranger could play well—that was evident to every one. But he was far from sober now. The tune was peculiar, and every now and then he landed on the wrong string and put all our teeth on edge. His style was marvellous; his flourishes superb. Tona, who never knew what was coming next, got all wrong with his rum-tum-tum accompaniment, but remained passive and unruffled. The time grew quicker and the tune weirder.

'Please,' cried the stranger, in the middle of a wild finale, 'please applaud—even if you don't like it!'

We applauded long and loudly.

The stranger stood up and bowed elegantly. He waited for the applause to die away. Then he bowed again and, pausing a second, so as to give it its full effect, he said:—

'Zank you!' in English.

With another flourish he handed the mandoline back to Giacomi who immediately struck up a tune.

Giacomina danced with me, and Vittorio and Stefen.

Afterwards I rested, Stefen by me on the wood-box.

'Signora,' he said, leaning down to my level, 'very probably I shall be going to America.'

'You too—will you be going with the others?'

'No, not until the spring,' he answered.

'And your wife?'

'She says she won't come,' he answered in a dissatisfied voice.

'But she ought to.'

'She says that she does not want to. Her parents are so old. She does not wish to leave them for the few years that remain. . . .'

It was true that both Cristofolo and Anetta were very old, but so were Marget and Filip.

Splash, splash, the old woman was sprinkling the floor rather liberally with water, and I drew my feet in under my chair.

'My parents,' went on Stefen, 'are also very old, and I do not like to leave them—but how can one live without money?'

'Must you really go?' I asked.

'During this year, signora, I have barely made seven hundred lire (£28), and that is not enough.'

No, indeed, and he had a wife and two children.

'I am sorry you are leaving us,' he said. 'I had hoped to be charcoal-burning on the mountain whilst you were there—but with all this rain I never got finished at the other place.'

The stranger was talking loudly to my neighbour.

'In America,' he was saying, 'it was so dull that I became a hunchback.'

He was trying to translate into Italian 'it gave me the hump!' Then he pulled out his handkerchief and went through the trick of crumpling it.

'How is Conrado getting on in America?' I asked, turning to Giacomina.

'Very well,' she answered, 'he has work and good wages. But my daughter is not at all pleased with him. He doesn't write often enough to her, so she says. There is always trouble, signora, when they get out to America.'

So it seemed. Raimondo and Teresina, too, were at loggerheads again. This time it was Raimondo that was angry. And I did not wonder at it.

At ten o'clock, as soon as the inn was closed, a few more people came in; Bigi, Nino, and Teresina amongst them. Bigi was the best dancer in the village, although big Giuseppe had been a better dancer in his day. All the men danced well, and so did most of the women, Stefen and Nino, perhaps, being not quite up to the mark. Nino looked a bit odd, dancing with slightly bent knees, and his chin in the air. But he was nice to dance with, except when he trod on your toes. That was a trick Gaetano also had had.

'And you are really going back to England?' Toni asked, during an interval, resting his hands on his guitar.

'Yes, I really am,' I answered, 'but I mean to come back and see you all again.'

'We shall never see you again,' Toni answered.

'But the signora says she is coming back!' interposed Ghita.

'People always say they will,' said Toni, 'but they never come.'

Giacomi twanged his mandoline and the others got ready for the last polketta. I danced with Nino. Afterwards, instead of dispersing, we all stood talking. Bigi was joking with Angelina and Filip's niece, and I was noticing how very elbowy his gestures were —just like Cristofolo's. I scarcely heeded what Nino was saying. Costante and Vittorio were dancing round and round in a circle.

Ghita was searching desperately for one of her zupei, which she had taken off for dancing, and which had somehow found its way into Faustino's pocket.

I suddenly became attentive and turned to Nino. Wonder of wonders, he was offering to lend me his house!

'Signora,' he was saying, 'should you come to Italy whilst we are in America, remember that our house always stands ready for you. You need only fetch the key from my sister's, and it will be yours.'

'You can have the house for as long as you like whilst we are away,' said Teresina.

'We should consider it an honour,' continued Nino. 'In any case you can always reckon on a bedroom when we are here—we could always put you up.'

'Of course for no payment,' said Teresina, so that that should be quite clear.

I thanked them as best I could, deeply touched by this kindness. There was no doubt they were in earnest. They were ready to lend me their house and all their things.

'We mean it,' said Teresina simply. She gave me a triumphant look. She was saying jubilantly to herself, 'Now we are quits.'

But I was feeling that after all I was the debtor.

.

The next morning we left San Lorenzo, in plenty of time, so I thought, to catch the 9.15. Filip had taken our luggage down earlier in the morning and was to meet us at the station. Rosina, Pina, and Angelina walked down with us.

About half-way Rosina stopped and pointed to some smoke in the distance.

'Ah! your train,' she cried, in a voice of consternation. 'You will never catch it. In a quarter of an hour it will be at the station. . . . Let us turn back.'

'We must try to catch it,' I answered, and began to run. We all ran. It was imperative to catch the train, which was the only one that connected with the express on the main line. To lose it meant twenty-four hours' delay.

We hurried down the road, which seemed interminable, Rosina expostulating. She tripped up on the way, tore her dress, and cut her knee, but she got up and ran on. Hot and breathless we arrived at the station at the same moment as the train. I rushed to buy the tickets. There was hardly a moment for farewells. Angelina hurriedly kissed us on both cheeks. We mounted the train, and our luggage was bundled in after us. I thrust all the silver in my purse into Filip's big hand. There was no time to count out what I owed him for bringing our luggage. The train began to move. One last handshake through the window, and we were off.

I could never make up my mind whether it was Bortolo or Rosina who put the clock back half an hour that morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

AMERICA

SINCE the days when Campià men first went out to America, conditions in the village had somewhat improved. There was more ready money about. But hand-in-hand with better times went increased expenses. The vines required a great deal more care since the phylloxera plague, and that meant greater expenditure in money as well as labour. Prices, too, had risen. Little wonder that the men, finding the future to hold no promise, turned their thoughts to America. A journey there was becoming as inevitable as military service.

But this money from America was by no means a solution to the economic problem. A man seldom remained long enough to save a sum sufficient for the next generation. He tried to make his savings last as long as he lived—but his son would have to go to America in his turn. And as long as the men came back and spent their savings in Italy, the Government would hardly do otherwise than encourage it. For in this way money was brought to the impoverished villages, and made life there possible.

Unfortunately it is no longer so easy a matter to make money in the States, and the stricter laws in regard to aliens passed by the United States Government, put new difficulties in the way of would-be fortune hunters.

I could not help wondering why nothing was done to improve the conditions at home. The peasants were not at all ignorant of agriculture, and especially in the care of vines were quite up-to-date. They did not seem to understand the care of live-stock so well. Bortolo frankly told me that fowls would die if kept in runs. No doubt they would if he had the care of them. Moreover, the cost of wire netting appalled him, and an incubator had never been seen in Campià.

It was on the vines and olives the peasants pinned all their faith. Wine played such an important part in their diet that they could not do without it. It took with them the place of tea and coffee. It was the custom to grow vines—so they grew them. I do not know what else they could have grown. Peasants cannot learn things from books, and there was no one in the village to show them by example nor any one who came there to teach. Perhaps there is nothing it would pay to grow that would mature before the August hailstorms. . . .

Charcoal-burning and lime-burning were both sources of additional income, but they could only be plied in moderation. As it was, the copses were cut for charcoal as fast as they grew, and when it came to lime-burning, the supply of lime exceeded the demand. Besides, a lime-kiln needed such a quantity of fuel. The culture of silkworms also helped to swell the income of many families, but it was not work undertaken willingly. No trade nor handicraft, other than spinning and knitting, was practised in the village. The women did not know how to weave, and it was exceptional if they were able to make their own clothes. Although most houses had an oven for the purpose, nobody baked bread, but perhaps lack of fuel accounted

for that. However, in every house, Italian paste was made for home use, and, of course, wine.

The olives, which were never destroyed by the hail to such an extent as the grapes, were taken to the co-operative society in the town, where the oil was extracted. The olives brought by each were kept apart and the oil extracted separately; some olives being richer in oil and therefore of more value. One luckless man, whose trees stood on poor soil, and had suffered from drought, once brought a cartload of olives to the society. Not a drop of oil would they yield—so, at least, I was told by Nino.

The other crops were maize, beans, and a small quantity of wheat. The sweet chestnuts were usually taken to market, but fruit for home consumption, such as apples, pears, peaches, figs, almonds, and cherries, were very plentiful. Mulberries were despised and never picked. Strawberries were unknown.

The signor on the mountain, who was Campià's representative on the Town Council, did not interest himself in the economic problems of the village. When I spoke to him about the hailstorm, he shrugged his shoulders and said: 'They can go to America.' As far as he was concerned the matter ended there.

In former times, some of the peasants had kept the wolf from the door by carrying on a brisk trade in contraband. The frontier was not far off. Nowadays it was too risky for any but the most daring. One man, however, regularly visited the village, secretly selling tobacco and sugar to thoroughly trustworthy customers. He had got these things through from Switzerland—La Sguissera, as Campià called it—recklessly incurring the penalty of imprisonment.

A peasant from the town, a man of the last generation, had made

a fortune dealing in contraband. Towards the end of his life, he was the richest man in the town, and built himself a beautiful house there. He invested his money in several successful commercial enterprises. He did a great deal for the poor, and supported various charities. It was no secret that he had been a smuggler. The grateful townsfolk have erected a monument to his memory. His daughters still live in the beautiful house, and are said to be fabulously rich. I became acquainted with their chauffeur. He was a languid little man, with dainty hands, adorned with rings, looking half asleep, but really very wide awake. He sometimes came to San Lorenzo with his friends. I think he must have studied some branch of engineering, for he had once made a tour in Wales, inspecting the coal mines.

After all, it was not altogether impossible for a peasant to get on and even do comparatively well if he stayed at home. But it needed hard work and rigid economy. It was necessary, however, in order to reach this happy state, to work continually. There could be no thought of a rest on Sundays. Clothes would have to be patched, food be of the simplest, and the spending of every palanca considered. And it is hardly necessary to add that it was only possible to those blessed with very small families.

A man in the village was working himself to death in this way. Probably in his case, the desire for gain had passed from thrift to avarice. There were not many who would work thus with no pleasures but the counting of halfpence.

.

In the States, the peasants usually stayed together with others of their own nationality, so that they came very little in contact with Americans. Very few of them seemed to like the life there,

and worked hard in order to make the stay as short as possible. Every spare palanca was put by, and next to nothing spent on pleasures.

When Gioan, Nino, and Bortolo were in California, economy prompted them to live in a cabin with three other Campià men. They did their own housekeeping and cooking. Gioan baked the bread. Nino and Bortolo were both ardent sportsmen—whenever the larder was empty they would get up before sunrise, and bag a few birds before going off to work in the gold mines. The life must have agreed with them, for they grew fat and looked uncommonly well, as a photograph taken at the time testifies. Unfortunately that well-nourished look had soon worn off on their return to Campià. Polenta is fattening, but it does not nourish like bread.

When the Fourth of July came round, the six men thought they would enjoy themselves, and agreed to spend the day in the nearest town, and in order to save the railway fare, decided to walk. I think they must have had a very hazy idea of the distance. Campià fashion, they set off at dawn. They walked on and on . . . and on. It was not before midday that they reached the town. Exhausted, hungry, and thirsty, they found their way to an eating house, and afterwards to a shady spot where they slept.

They woke up just in time to catch the last train home.

Thus passed the Fourth of July, the only holiday until Christmas, for they worked both week-days and Sundays.

Christmas Day they decided to spend at home. Feeling home-sick, they thought they would celebrate the occasion by drinking some wine. Some real red wine, such as they had not tasted for months. They put their money together and bought some. It was port. Thinking of la bella Italia they tossed it off as they would

the wine of their own country. The result was lamentable. They were horrified to find that only a little of it made them drunk. . . .

In October, shortly after we left for England, seven men left Campià for America. They were Agostino, who was now old enough to travel alone, Marco, who had been the signor's cowman, Faustino's youngest son, who had just finished his military training, Biscotti, and an uncle of Giacomi's. These five went direct to New York. Stefen did not go. Perhaps Dominica, who was always ready to give a helping hand to her relatives, made it possible for him to stay.

Nino and Bertoldi—both one-eyed men—sailed for Canada. They worked their way south, to Buffalo, where they succeeded in crossing the frontier. Then they made their way to Pennsylvania, where Raimondo, Gaetano, and many others, were at work. They arrived at Christmas, very much the worse for wear, having suffered terribly from the cold, for which they were most unsuitably clad.

'We had all sorts of adventures,' wrote Nino, 'here it is less bad, but it is much better to be in Campià—because of these benedette palanche I have to put up with every sort of trial.'

Fortunately there was plenty of work, so for a time all went well. The following March, Nino was able to send his wife the money for her fare, and early in April she made the journey with her little boy. Poor Teresina liked America even less than she had expected.

'This is an ugly place,' she wrote from the coal mines of Pennsylvania. 'Here we are in a desert, deprived of every amusement. I do not willingly remain in America.'

Nino's temporary good fortune soon turned. Poor fellow, he was always so unlucky that if he had taken to hair-dressing, people

would surely have been born without heads. In August war broke out in Europe. As a result the coal mines were partially closed. For a time Nino worked three days a week. Afterwards he had no work at all, but lived on his savings, feeling more and more desperate as they dwindled away. Teresina gave birth to a baby, another little boy, red-haired like his excellent aunt, the wife of Giacom. Nino was still without work. In despair they moved to another town, but fresh disappointments awaited them there. As a last hope Nino borrowed money, and they crossed the continent to California, to the gold mines where he had worked during his former stay. On the day of arrival Battisti fell ill and for a fortnight added to the anxiety of his already distracted parents. Then he recovered. Nino found a job at last, but not a very remunerative one. Many months and perhaps years will pass before he will be able to bring Teresina back to Campià. Meanwhile the house stands temptingly empty—but it is too near the frontier for us to venture there.

.

and Venezia at the mercy of the invador. It was over the Brenner passes and across the Julian Alps that barbarian invasion had come as far back as Roman times. Now, by the treaty of Saint Germain and of Rapallo, Italy has a natural frontier salient along the crest of the Rhatian and Julian Alps that completes her unity and gives her security. More than twelve roads could be used for invasion under the prewar frontier. Only four, easily defendable, exist now.

* *

Many New Inhabitants.

The frontiers and the Adriatic have been looked upon in the past as storm centers because of the minority races existing behind them. Signor Mussolini recently spoke of the "war in the east," in addressing the Leghorn cadets, and Senator Ricci named the Adriatic as one of the outstanding questions between France and Italy. By that he meant the question of defending the low sandy littoral of Italy against the rocky island fringed Dalmatian coast of Jugoslavia, backed by a French alliance.

By the peace treaties Italy got 2,237,000 new inhabitants, nearly half of a different race, and over 11,500 square kilometers of territory which was formed into the provinces of Bolzano, Trento and Udine to the north, and Gorizia, Treste, Istria, Fiume, and Zara to the northeast and east.

In the south Tyrol [Bolzano and Trento] the frontier was advanced from the Carnic to the Rhatian Alps. The reasons for this annexation were largely strategic. North of Trento the population was nearly all German. But through those passes at the Brenner Italy has always seen her enemies approach. The Tyrol was the key to Italy. The Romans had held and fortified its mountains against the Goths, the Hohenstauffens had descended through the Brenner to batter at the walls of Milan; the district had been the battleground throughout the middle ages of popes and emperors; the area was so strong that the counts of Tyrol were able to assert their independence from their mountain castles and defy their mightier neighbors in Austria and Bavaria. One of these castles is noted for its association with Margaret Maultasch, the famous ugly duchess.

* *

The Envy of Nations.

From time immemorial, in fact, the fertile valley in the heart of the mountains bounded by Bolzano and Merano has been the envy of surrounding countries and its history largely the history of international relations. Waves of soldiers have poured down through it to get possession of Italy

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

how to rehabilitate and reshape the economic life of those provinces which depended on the Danube hinterhand with which they formerly constituted an economic and administrative unity.

With the Germans in the Tyrol, the economic problem is not the principal one. There the tourist industry is the chief source of wealth. In the Venezia Giulia, however, including the towns of Trieste and Fiume, the problem is mainly economic. To sustain these two cities, Italy requires close relations with the Balkans to get the Balkan business men to use the Adriatic ports as its outlet. For strategic boundaries here do not coincide with economic ones.

* *

East Coast Defenseless.

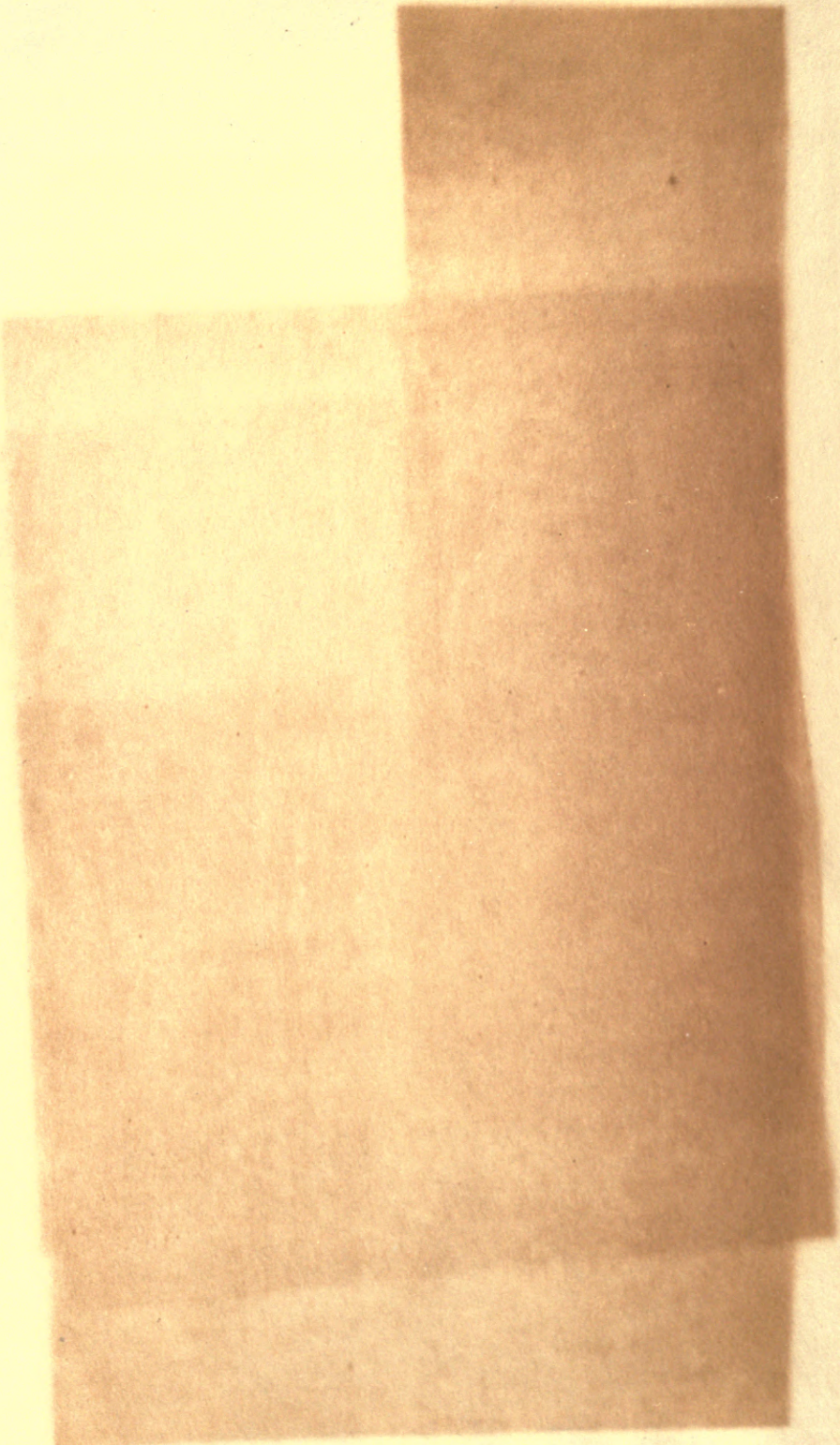
Italy's east coast on the Adriatic is practically defenseless. The littoral is low and sandy and has not that line of mountains and fringe of anfractuous islands which characterizes the opposite coast in Dalmatia. This is always in the background of Italian naval thought.

Furthermore, it takes six hours to cross the Appenines from Rome to Ancona, the only harbor of any value between Venice and Bari. Like Brindisi, it is fortified and has an arsenal. Once its port receipts from trade with the near east were heavy. Recently I counted only twelve small

ited wholly by Albanians. settled there in the old d the Croats by the Vene told. I walked back t through a wide avenue trees which made a gree under the electric street Viennese waltzes and opera music was still go on the promenade.

The town seemed pictu believable like a tiny oper or a little isolated city o would certainly be ideal seeking something out of a cheap vacation. The b the Hotel Bristol cost se

I stopped in a bookstor an Italian paper printed t in Zara. Across the top manent banner line sayi remember that the whole is Italian soil." Officially only Zara, but unofficially constantly lay claim to coast.



University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 055 571 4

Univ
Sc
L